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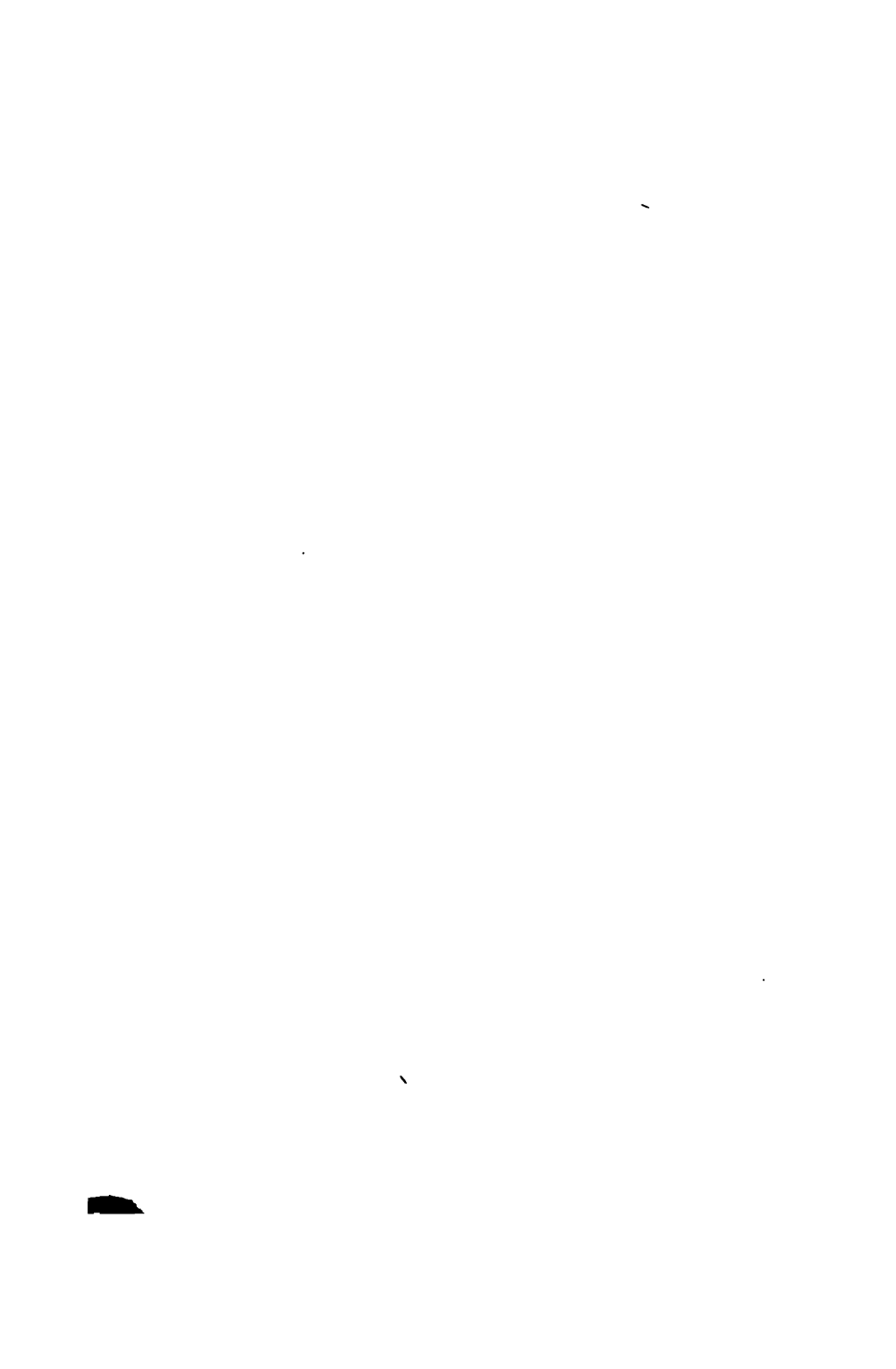
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BROKEN SHACKLES

BROKEN SHACKLES

BY

JOHN GORDON Dorrance.

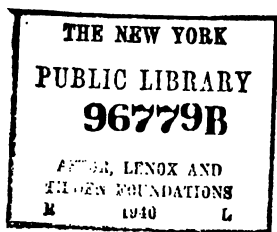
"Such is man that it is reality which surprises us."



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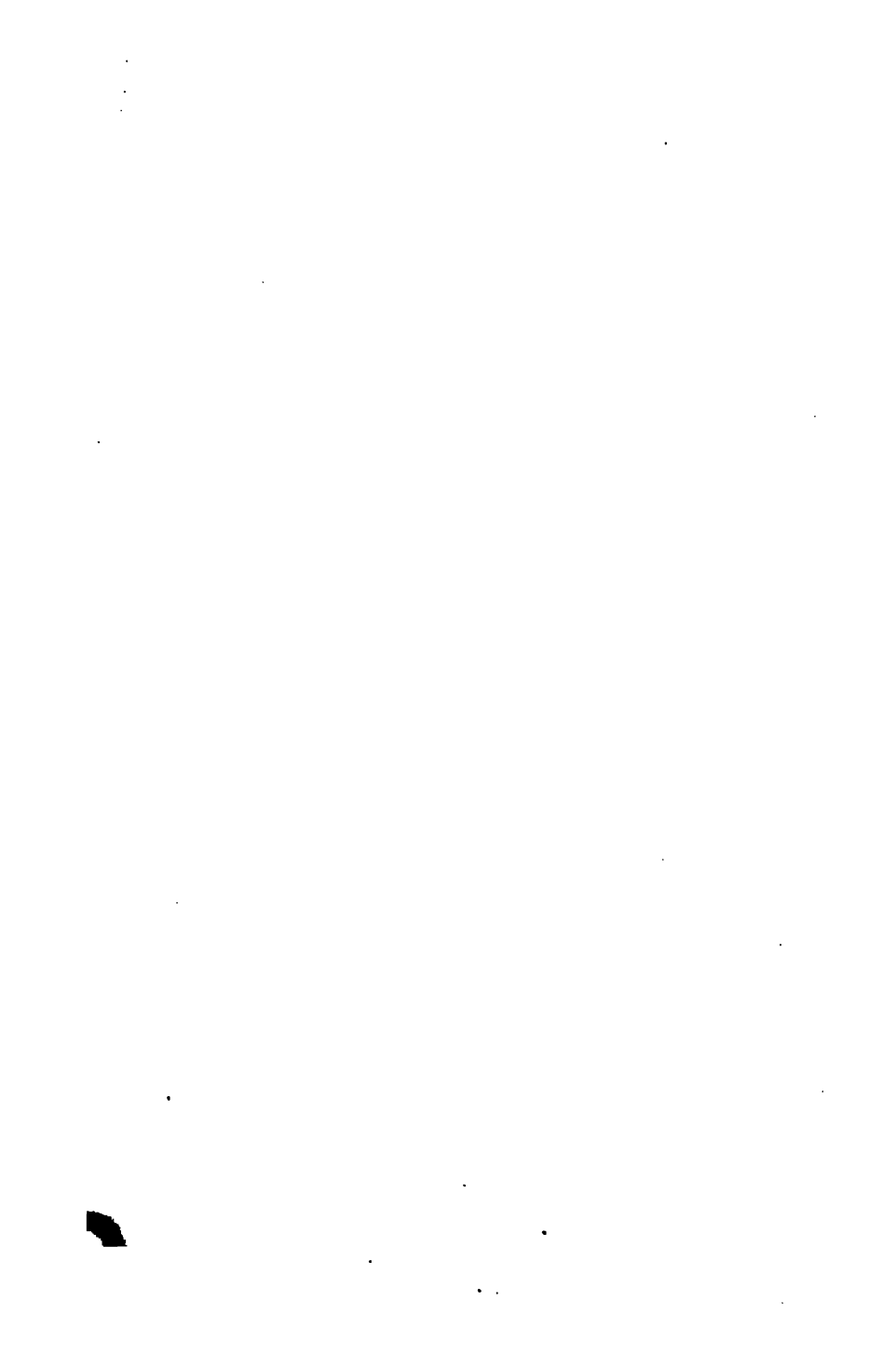
To

**THE HEWERS OF WOOD
AND
THE DRAWERS OF WATER
WHEREVER THEY MAY BE**

*This is a Novel of Work;
and of the Wages of Work*

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Broken Shackles

WORK

I

AESTHETIC souls have pried in vain for Slab Fork's *raison d'être*. The strictly business sort, however, would have quickly touched another side, seen that that side was *business*, and pronounced it good. Slab Fork was only a victim of circumstances. Circumstances were forests, great counties of them; and a man — large of pocket, small of soul. The greater victim that was the Fork had shortly its trifling victims: men and women, red hands, lean bodies, tired feet. But they certainly did the business.

The town sat at the wide-branched fork of a mountain river which sprang from climbing hills and travelled, swiftly first, then at an amble, to the sea. Looked down at pleasantly from hilltops all about, you would have claimed it "squatted" there, much more than sat, for Slab Fork was the most one-storied, sprawled-out sort of place man ever saw. It began beside the River, and reached back in a struggling sort of way to culled-pine forests. Woods choked it in and hemmed it close, throwing advance-guards of trees even to the Fork's back door.

Great Moosehead River was a stream of much vicissitude. It rose, as you of course must know, near Canada. It started life as though it purposed going north, then like some pretty wilful woman changed, and shortly found its way on south, on by sharp peaks and quiet valleys of the Adirondacks. Silver at evening, at noon it held the color of the sky; and the woods that lay about it sighed in comfort and in happiness, so that at night their voices joined the noise of little waves and polished stones to make the quiet places glad. Its valley was a woods-set gem that Heaven long ago had hall-marked beauty.

There occurred a speculator and a mill man, two in one, and the timber over-night changed hands. A mill screeched its siren one morning, and "Slab Fork" was come to stay. Waste wood littered the forest and town, slabs lay scattered about like water-lily petals on a long-fouled pond; and hilled-up sawdust blown around the mill formed drumlins high as that structure itself, but much more vast. At that time there was no insurance on the mill nor on the homes of its dependants. The latter were not worth it, but the former would not stand it.

The stream still coursed on its way. But about the time that silver was well started on its struggle to be free, and folks still talked of the "sixties" as though they really remembered, the river had begun the man-found work. Streams are not meant to play, and in place of the forest came shacks upon its banks. Dams stored water in the spring, then let it out again; tumbled log-lengths stilled the noise of its chatter; and dust from the mill and chips from the work spotted the silver and dirtied the blue that sometime had lighted the river. At night a deer perhaps might jeopardize a life to drink its water; occasionally when snows



were deep and foodstuffs scarce a wolf complained; but gradually the wild was tamed, the land was modernized. The Man looked on, and saw that it was good.

A climbing, struggling logger's road reached in from a village fifteen miles below, one known as Mapleton and built there advantageously on standard-gauge which took the forest products of the hills, and carried them away to other centers which altered them to dollars, factories, homes. When there were any, this logging railroad carried passengers upon its one trip up and one trip down each day, and also mail.

Were you a passenger as it left Mapleton at dawn one morning, riding in a caboose which trailed a load of flats or logging empties, you would slowly and not without some jerks and bounds have passed from country and into forest. The road ran Indian-fashion, up, always up, on the sides of the hills and the ridges; and the tracks below and above you looked not unlike the shining folds of some huge, fairy-tale python stretched out in the warmth of the sun. At the journey's beginning, and well-nigh throughout, the forests passed were only faintly reminiscent of the first, for they were "skinned." Scrubby stuff now, but white pine nearly all the first of them had been, the pine that housed and warmed, and fortified and nourished thirteen puny Colonies till they gave birth to more. Decaying butts and fire-scarred, prostrate trunks of trees, disintegrating now and huts for squirrels, still lay about.

When the logging train had steamed to the edge of a heavier forest, next thundered clear across the long and slender bridge which spanned the Moosehead, Slab Fork and your journey's end were reached.

An unpainted shed halted the train for passengers and mail before the empties went on to the mill. A shaky carryall took both to the Store. There was

little formality with driver Pete. He simply spat on the platform boards, picked up his sack and grunted, "Get in if you're goin'."

The road he took was partly built of mud, the rest of sawdust. Erratically it passed by divers places which revealed themselves as dry-kilns, lumber-sheds, and yards. There were acres of yards, and more than a few of the others, but they dropped behind as the road led into the single street of a small, dun-colored town. It was the residential section, "exclusive," as a cheerful stranger said, "since one man owned it all." He owned the houses, owned the land; he owned the school, he owned the church; the Post Office and store, the railroad and saloon — were his; the mills, the yards; the homes, and most of those that in them dwelt. Born in his huts, baptized in his church, taught in his school, reared in his town, worked in his mill or sold to his saloon, they sank at last in two poor yards of ground — also his. You couldn't cheat.

In days bygone the owner of them all, one Holden Gates of Mapleton, had sometimes summered here, with many guests, and then the town perforce had looked, if not attractive, at least presentable and livable. But the cottage where the Moosehead widened round an island had been cobwebbed many a year, and thin-laid paint on other homes had slowly peeled and flaked away.

Beyond dead rows of squat and little-windowed shacks rose up tall mill-stacks and a smudgy burner, both belching smoke and showering soot, to sky, on neighborhood. To the left of the road there sagged a building little larger than its mates. It was only Social Hall. The road gave up completely at the Store, Pete left you there — you had Slab Fork.

If you remained so long, you saw at noon the Fork

Hotel, so named, Jake Baker once averred, because "you used your knife." There, with messes of others, the traveller was served with a-plenty of "chuck." Chuck was generally boiled, after the fragrant fashion of the place, and it was also usually bolted. The Company boasted of its food. They had a right: didn't it cost them two bits per man per day? As they said, and it *did* sound convincing, "You can't work men on an empty belly." Clerks ate one side in a sane atmosphere of commonplaces, most generally climatic; lumberjacks and sweating workmen bolted on the other amongst a gurgling silence. Talk took time; they ate. They said that if a man should stumble coming in, too late to reach his place, he might as well resign his mind to wait another meal. These chaps, care-free of wife or shack, were hungry. To a great extent they were self-helped. Some were apparently always there. The night-shift rose at 6 P.M. to breakfast at their fellows' supper, the latter falling into infested bunks just vacant. Come Sunday, half lay on the floor. So was a flop-house of the second class.

Always the mill gave up its roar, and sent out products for the New World that was building. Stacks reddened by night the skies they darkened by day.

It could be wonderful, this game, man aiding man to build a great America, hand touching hand and heart kept close to heart to make a common land. Was it? Of course not — man against money; hard dollars stacked against long days; a thousand builders to one dweller in a house up-built by blistered hands, smashed heads, and broken backs. Its utmost story felt some sun perhaps; but down below, deep down, was dampness, rot.

No man of them knew more anent Slab Fork, its early, clinging forests, than old "Admirable" Rogers.

No man would have told you less. Mill men, while they laughed, respected the strange old fellow, not for what he was or had been, but for much that still survived. According to the Company his present value was a dollar-and-a-half per day. He doubtless earned it in the box factory in which he worked as able, when neither drunk nor sick.

All, forest and mill and yards, were as tinder waiting a match. A fire of pine-wood slabs and curly shavings was the single luxury the poorest man among them could afford. And they were *poor*. They had never thought of ice, except in winter, nor sweet milk once a day for babies, in the summer. A great many of the babies died, but there were always plenty more. Wind-leaking, dirt-floored houses were slow to take the heat in winter, quick to lose it. Fires fell low; sometimes you froze; but really, not often. They were so poor that they were used to it. Having no contrasts, they came in time to know it well, and felt that it had always been. Which of course was a great help, and democratic.

Families were greater than wages. Education, like the teacher, "stopped around." The teacher, maybe, stayed a week; the other lasted possibly three years. Attendance was one to a family, and there were always smaller ones to go to school. Graduates, aged nine or ten, at once matriculated in the box factory.

Employment agencies outside had ever advertised the "steady work" obtaining at the Fork. They said little of wages, and knew what advertising meant. Pay-days occurred by months, with a wait of two weeks at the end of the month; that is, you were paid on the 15th of February some eighteen cents an hour for the time you had done in January, with deductions. Between months, though, small coin of the Company

was paid, albeit somewhat at a discount. It passed current at the Store and "Pop's." They drew and spent, and charged things. Come pay-day, and an envelope which only held a notice. You had simply overdrawn, somehow the charge accounts ran high.

Raises were not in vogue, much. "Take it or leave it," as genial Black-Jack Larrabie, the mill boss, said, if by any chance your envelope held money. You were grateful there wasn't less, for it was really inexpedient to quit if owing money to the Store. Someone tried it once, and got to Mapleton. Mapleton was the county seat. The courts and jails were at Mapleton.

But credit was often extended. In the meantime you worked. Twelve-hour days they were, sometimes fourteen, often more, for these are the times of a real man's work, not hindered by namby-pamby wage-scales, double-time, time-and-a-half, or a legalized limit of effort. Personal efficiency was at a discount; "work and we'll do the thinking" served as the simple credo.

And Myra Barnes, who taught school there and lived around, was pleased to say at trying times, "They have no poetry in their souls."

Yet these — the breathing, moving, actual Slab Fork — did not in the least disconcert you, being only what was expected.. They knew what sweat smelled like, and how it felt to freeze, numb inches at a time, in winter. The sun in its path had burned their faces, when their backs were wet; the winds of winter chilled and slowed the blood that in the torrid days had almost burst through veins. They were the weak left hand of wealth, a comic economic error.

The foreigners, and they led, wore what they had, in summer for less discomfort, in winter for more heat. Suits of the old, their weaker parts removed, wrapped

up the young. Style was unknown. It was something, sometimes anything, to *wear*. The native-born thought some of neatness, and their economies would cause the pallid, shame-faced cheek of old "threadbare gentility" to blush for opulence. Close-cropped women and long-haired men were they. If some of the women were not, in all good faith they looked it, with fading hair pulled back from vacuous faces, and bunched in small hard knots that capped their heads. As for their men it was one more economy, for in the barber's shop, kept open nights and Sundays by a whilom artist who meantime bent his fingers and abilities to supplementary employment in the box mill, it cost two bits to have the hair cut on the head and shaved dish-like above the neck. Such cuttings were endured when they might no longer be put off.

Yet in good Slab Fork such things passed by unnoticed. No man was manly whose face and head lacked suitable adornment, and apparently their women satisfied them, for men at work stopped often at their tasks to gaze upon thin-breasted, slab-shaped females that passed along the wooden trams whose pulpy boards formed nearly all the highways and the byways of the town. They were offering no disrespect, and many of the women smiled with the attention they excited. The workers of the woods and mill were boisterous. It was hard to plant refinement when one's shoes let in the snow.

Occasionally some met in Social Hall. On Sundays it was "church" — one religion and one God. Their church was sectless, and its comfort was not warm. God lived a far way off. The meetings of the week-day were sufficiently unsocial, but those of Sunday chilled and non-sectarian throughout. Social democracy breeding discussion, they added little to that barren day

which dangled hope all through a breaking week, then by its awful emptiness made man and woman turn again to work. It was a one-man Sabbath.

II

Two raggedly unkempt urchins struggled over a wooden threshold, and with their feet on the hard-packed ground outside the elder turned to close the door. He relinquished for the moment a hand of the smaller one, till then held in his own. The little chap began to whimper.

He wept as if he knew how, as though he had before that very day, and over the small, brown face, for the most part wind-chapped and very grimy, appeared two paler places where that day's tears an hour or two before had fissured out a crooked way. New drops paused at the verge of his eyes, and stopped for a bit to launch themselves from reddened lids to the parallel lines that made way down his cheeks. The other lad saw it, for he was quick to place a small, weak arm across the shoulders of the mournful one.

He, now the man, had been crying too not many minutes gone, for the length of the night before and through the day that followed he had been the humbly feeling host of a commonplace, insistent eareache. Unable to remedy the ill themselves, in time his older folk had tried to get him to the Doctor. And they had, at least to the Doctor's office. A pity he was so often away, as on the night before, and still that morning. A good soul, too, but he wasn't a man-Doctor, really, as even the children said, for this good Company was

wise enough to hire a nurse for the brute animals that aided in the conduct of their business, and added not a little to the profits of their old and very meritorious concern. Teams cost real money. "Doc" Wimple was meant for a purpose, and kept to a task. And, far ways from superman, the "Doc" could seldom cope with the impossible of sick-visiting two spots at once with but a single work-complaining body. His course in life was a horse-path, and it seldom lay convenient to the rough-graded, broader highway where lay the men, and the children of men, he knew.

As long as live-stock kept healthy, the men and women with their children — and they had them — worried along with his converted services quite well, but since there were so many of the other creature-patients in his sour little settlement, still more about the woods and camps outside, quite naturally the harassed Doctor often roved afield on other mission bent than on the healing of the sick among plain people. Since all of them were poor, sickness was not uncommon; and as they often came into the world without outside assistance, so did they frequently escape as simply from it. Every man's home was his hospital; the Company veterinary did what he could to them; and the Company store sold castor oil and turpentine.

The boy's father had gone with him to the Doctor's on the night before, and his mother just that morning when the other had obeyed the whistle of the mill. For it was persistent, and it would not be denied. Small lives came and spent lives went, and troths were plighted; men danced and wasted and drank, but women seldom sang to the tune of its hoarse-voiced blast.

Late that night the father, suffering, gulped once or

twice when they were home and said, "Well, Andy Johnson, boy, you'll *have* to stand it for to-night." Andy did, and the others had not been shorn of their rest, but he — well, of course, he didn't sleep so very much. Then came his second visit to the Doctor, an hour or more ago. Again at home and freshly disappointed, the young boy's mother bethought her of a cure-all his father's father used across the seas. For Andy was a New World member of an Old World race, and the waters of the Skager Rack another day had cast their salty mist against the fresh-skinned faces of his ancestors.

The scrimpy medicine chest came forth, and from the part-full, vari-shaped vials of wintergreen essence, peppermint, cherry-bark pectoral, turpentine, also something like oil, she chose the last. Andy, on his knees, so placed his head in the mother's lap that she was quickly able to inflict an earful of the liquid without the spilling of a drop. The shock of inundation helped him to forget the pain, and the drops that shortly percolated out and trickled down his back as he arose diverted him so effectually that the tears which had foregathered round his tired eyes for several hours were sucked back out of sight again.

That duty done, the mother furnished Andrew a little scrap of iron metal stamped by their Company "five cents," and sent him out to buy the bread that she had no time to bake. She saw that the younger George went with him, for the store was not so near that the absence of the pair might not afford her some much-needed time to work, and think, and a little perhaps to rest, all functions which the worthy woman but seldom found compatible with care and bearing of a family. Clutching their mite of bread-money in one hand, George Anderson by the other, Andy went adventuring.

He posed as a man and protector, a rôle he often played, and filled.

The door shut them out, and for just a moment the woman sank against a wooden rest to gain her strength, as the two small chaps outside braced the searching, inquisitive breath of a cold North spring. The boys were six and eight, the former even the junior in that phthisical settlement where broods were only limited by force of parent vine, no thought bestowed on what should fill requiring mouths when they were weaned to mushy stews of the Old World, or the pork and bread of the New. The slattern creature who had seen them go did not reflect like this. She was only tired.

Neither boy, outside, was in any way encumbered with overcoat or jacket to shield an ill-built body from the frost-bit air. Andy turned up the small coat-collar for the younger, afterward thought of his own. Both shivered slightly.

About the head of Andy was loosely tied a piece of cotton cloth. It was chiefly dirty and worn, this wrapping, and kept a clumsy place a-cock his head as by legerdemain. Perhaps one day it had contributed to make his mother's underskirt, for it was dimly figured, even hemstitched just a bit along the edge. Over an eye it hung, and farther back as loosely wrapped the oil-filled ear. Had any other boy observed him, he would certainly have chuckled, loudly; some mother might possibly have cried. Andy's clothing and that of George was shabby and old, well-darned of knee and seat and where the little bony elbows had helped to thin the sleeves in all good time. The shoes of course were poor, stubbed-out affairs, scant of toe and low at heel. The stockings that stretched from

the shoes to the much-bagged, cut-down or grown-out trousers, as it happened to be George or Andy wearing them, were no more innocent of mending nor of holes. Neither had mittens, but two red hands sought for and held each other tight, the while two others dug deep in their respective pockets.

They passed nobody as they walked, and it would not have mattered if they had. They might have seemed pitiful to a "foreigner" from the great outside, had there been such an idler in the place where men rose to labor from whistle to whistle, and laid aside oppressing work at night just so it might be handy for another day. They simply coughed and froze from the reluctant light of cold auroral dawns, through chilly noons to ice-marked nights; or bent with other days, sun-dried with seething heat, slow-coming of shadowy dusk and toil-marked nights which only seemed less hard because there was no light to see the sweat. Men lived, and finally died to find the easy way; while women worked and saved and slaved, to make the meagre wages of the toil and toll yield up poor food and poorer clothing for far from meagre lacks of always needing families. The left-over crust of a day was respectable fare for the next, as the passed-up clothing of one was fitted down to another. Families seldom grew up. The elder children married early. They courted responsibility; wed work; and bred trouble. Re-enforcements took their places.

It was a System, an earth-old System of father and son, mother and daughter and children. It nicely engendered stupefied minds and soul-sick men; drab, grubbing women barren of hope as they were not of child. Meeting, the two brought forth new shoots well-fitted to replace them. The offspring? They were beaten before they were born. The mills themselves

went on, and on. They paused not, and they ground fine. It was a place of derelicts.

It may have been the air, perhaps a little craving for the bread, that set the pace for Andy and the almost-running George. The walk was not a short one from their corner of the Fork's undecorated shacks to the Company emporium, where buck-shot was purveyed with tea of the near-East, and coarse flour sold for a consideration along with "views" of that fair city's pock-marked spots. For the most part these sang of log ponds, or of mills which filled the air with smoke while the photographer exposed a plate, so giving off a most desirable effect of a fall-born haze which was delightfully enhanced by the ascending efforts of a giant burner stood beside the mill. Outsiders called the pictures "interesting." To those who saw the views, first-hand, they were "the Fork."

Habitually, such dabs of home-grown color were met and passed unseen by the two now going up the hill that flanked a grinding, smoking mill, painted and painting in soot, filled with the hollow cries of men, alive with the shriek of machines that took and tore and kept unsatisfied. To their father it was *bread*; to the philosopher, "*big business*"; to a woman it was *dirt*; to the boys, "*the mill*."

As they came to the clamoring bull-chain — thick of link, heavy of load, as it portaged its logs from pond to saw — their father saw them. He thundered down a welcome. As quickly he looked to his task as the trunk of a squat white pine bade him raise to the utmost the swinging door that opened inward to admit the log, and out again to half exclude the air when it was cold. The children answered as they passed, for work was something to be undisturbed.

Nor did they stop just after, at an open, steaming

engine-room, inviting by the open door and the warm look of it within. It stood a little up the path, where stout Bill Boddfish — officially an engineer, in pay a fireman, always friend — bawled out to ask the elder all about his folks at home, and just by chance to inquire of the bandaged head. Of course he had a remedy, and re-enforced his loudly-shouted questions with others of the health of Andy's mother, and if in fine his elder brother Hans had not been drinking even more of late.

For Bill was always kindly interested, he being a typically worthy oaf, and in the case of men and their affairs obliged in leaving any little thing — like work — he had in hand. To whom he talked didn't matter. He pestered men, had gossip with their wives, chaffed oddly with their daughters.

"It kind of eases things along," Bill used to say; and probably the Management, forever stern, would have eased poor Bill along some years ago had not the ample energy belonging to Bill's father, and for long expended to Company glory and profit, made total restitution for any mental hookworm of the son.

He would have talked now had the boys stopped, but they didn't. Not encouraged, no more discouraged, he merely finished as they passed, "Nice day anyhow, ain't it?" then heaved a sigh and returned to his shovel. Ah, well, he could work when there was nothing else. "Wordy Bill" had a single cardinal sin.

From beyond the mill the path dipped down and showed a bit of the lake beyond the log-mussed shore and huddling buildings, a little lake fringed sparsely in abandoned pine and hemlock, now bathed by sun, now ruffling with the wind. It was all as old as Andrew and George and it appeared much older, for to

them it seemed as if it must have always been. *Scenery*, if it had been there, would probably have failed to make the younger boy forget the effort to make a summer cap come down across his ears, or the elder stop his hustling both to keep the younger warm. For a while in the face of the wind, it caught and struck at them again as the path curved round a yard of rotting, low-grade boards, on up a short incline, just past the Fork Hotel and to the Store which was its neighbor.

The store was set between two well-known buildings, for next it on the other side was Pop Baum's "Drug Store." Pop apparently had always been on deck, waxing increasingly fat, growing exceedingly rich, on the nickels and dimes of such as came his way; and they in truth were not a few, for the solace of drink was denied to no man of that fair city. If he earned much, he could afford it; if he didn't, he would fall behind in spite of Hell, so just what difference could it make? Perhaps it left the wife a little woebegone at times, but then it sure made *him* feel a whole lot better. Married men usually worked for a wife, and the children. Liquor stood next. Single ones toiled by the month for an evening in town. Liquor was first. Six months of work equalled one wild night: a bodyful of whiskey that ran down and burned; a jade; a dying of the senses; a waking; an empty pocket-book; a headache; possibly more. "Hard come and easy go." Well, it was all in the way of the woods. It was all right. Of course occasionally some sotted fool gave to the mill an arm or leg, and some frail woman thereby lost her right to eat. But the Company agreed they had to have it, so for a slight commission they tolerated Pop and everyone was satisfied.

Just now a crowd of idling men were gathered on a very shabby porch. Pop "didn't believe in airs;

might scare the trade." Men from the night crew lined the railing and spotted the steps of his grog shop. The day crew, being at work, was not then filling the beds, and these took drink instead of sleep. They were ringed about someone so closely that only the sound of a voice reached out, one sadly well known to the boys as it rose, in tottering tenor, to conclude a woodsman's drink song —

*"So we'll wrinkle up our lips,
And take another sip
Of the good old mountain dew."*

The fragment ended, the song died.

The group parted with the last line, and the disordered person of a man emerged, a man so drunk with the squirrel liquor of the place that he half-fell down the steps. His walk was a roll, and another lent the first his staggering company. Strangely, the boys recognized this second comer first. He was one who had long been *tabu* in Slab Fork, for Red-eye Ed was generally and not unjustly known by a reputation as rank as his breath, a reputation that had first cost his job, then home, and finally forced departure, worse than pauper, from the town. Now and again the outlaw appeared, from where nobody knew nor cared so he got back there fast enough.

The hat of the other was over his eyes, but with an oath he raised it, threw it off, and stamped it on the ground. This was Hans.

"Hello, li'l brothers, whasshu doin' way up here? Better g'home. Ain't a place for li'l men like you. Whasshu doin' here, anyway? Spick up. Ain't afraid, hey?"

A boy better reared would not have answered; quite possibly he might have disappeared, afraid. Andy still

held his younger brother's hand, and said instead that he was there to buy a loaf of bread.

"Bread, eh? Whaddoes an'budy want of bread? Whee! Lesh have another drink?"

He looked at Ed. Ed nodded. "Yeh, lesh have 'nother drink." Ed was an echo: he was always primed for drinking; and never solvent for a drink. When he "treated" he forgot to pay. That was Ed.

Drink-glutted as he was, Hans looked at Ed, and recollected. He sobered a very little, and gave a side-long glance in the direction of the boys. Wonder and fear were painted on the face of the smaller, a young surprise, not fear, causing the fine blue eyes of Andy to open, the hand on his brother's to gradually tighten.

The other hand relaxed, the bit of money fell. It rolled a little way. He took a step, and stooped to pick it up — not so quickly though but that the fuddled Hans had caught his shoulder roughly as he rose.

"Gimme it, Andy," he cried, "gimme it!" The boy to the drunkard was only his brother; the money a drink. He caught the boy not over-gently, wrenched at his hand, and would have shortly had the coin, too, had not another witness just come up. One "Admirable" Rogers had approached, till then unnoticed, and the drunken fellow was set spinning by the hand of a stooped old man, a man that rough life and worse manners had as yet not altogether spoiled of a cleaner and better-thinking manhood than was common. Even Boddfish's curiosity surrendered to an exception.

The boys were satisfied. Not waiting to see more, they left. The storekeeper was waiting at a window. Had the Store been his and not the Company's, there is no doubt but that the wily Louis Frank would have arrived before the "Admirable," for Louis was a busi-

ness man and would not tacitly have seen bread money so diverted from his store to Pop's. He took it now, and in a piece of old print paper that had once upon a time no doubt been news, twisted a poor, pinched-looking loaf grabbed from an open case, a crumby goods-box at this season mercifully bereft of flies, though of their memory still clear.

He shoved their package at them crossly and omitted to say "thank you," walking to the Post Office along the other side to finish distribution of the one day's mail. He would read such of it as had not been sealed, for Louis' post was a dull one, and he simply made the most of it. It was even related that he could take a paper from its wrapper, inspect it, and put it back again with nothing so much as a crease in the paper or a doubt in the mind of the ultimate customer. As for the "thank you," it was unadulterated waste. "Thank you" impliedly denoted "call again." Well, the fewer the better, thought he, and it wasn't his old store anyway. And even if it were, it wouldn't change the status much. The Company town had one store; it was the Company Store. "If people didn't like it, they could go without." Buying by mail outside was pitifully transparent, express agent-post-master-storekeeper being as one. It might have saved the laborer a little money; sometimes it cost men jobs. They usually spent where they earned, all of it.

Andy had the bread, also enough of walking. Taking the same way home, the mother opened for them when they reached her door. She had had a little rest, had done a bit of work, and she was glad to see them back. Sometimes the tired woman told herself that she was almost glad to see them go; and still their comings-home, even from little journeys, gave her joy.

"But ain't you been a long time, Andy? What's kep' you? Where'd you go?"

George's attention centered on warming his feet at the red-heated stove which was a cooking range and furnace, while Andy mumbled some reply. She would know soon enough; she always did. Hans came home when he could not go elsewhere.

The mother bustled about, too busy to catch the boy's half-heard reply, sliced up her bread for one good meal, and set the stew a little forward on the stove. For noon was on its quickening way. The emptiness of morning was due to meet the need of night. His all-in-all of meals, his plain-cooked, noon-served dinner, must await the worker. It took a spell to come and get it. There was no time to linger. The meal was usually partaken of in gulping silence, an indigestion-making gorge.

Andy sat down on the dirt-packed floor, in a half-warmed corner out of the way. He chose the floor, for the chairs were at the table. The house was cold, and he. A whistle far-off blew, and in a little time his father came. The man's eyes showed his pleasure in stepping into the little home that he had quitted some six hours before. His smile took in the room, the mother, then Andy at the stove, his head now shorn of aural covering.

"Feel better, don't you, Son?" he called to him, and then the mother summoned them to table. Their grace was unsaid gratitude, though the father's face clouded at the empty chair beside his wife's. Questions he might have asked had answer soon enough. The pine door swung upon its hinges heavily, Hans stood there for a moment in the opening, then spilled into the room.

Not speaking, they carried him upstairs, frail mother, wretched father. They said nothing; it was not new.

Again they were at the table. Andrew touched his mother's hand, and she smiled wanly at the child. Her smile was full of love; she had done with being happy. Heart-tragedies were simply spelled. There was no need to mourn. Indeed, it was nearly time for the whistle.

III

To such of the old-American as Hamlin County boasted in its Slab Fork corner came the freshest stock of Europe, well-formed men, hearty women, who had frankly come to get and take away. Citizen, mercenary, earned alike; one striving to support a soul, the other happy with a body. A nation lent its warmth, but clinkers filled the melting pot. The citizen gave of himself, heart, body, soul; *auslanders* laughed, and took.

They gave as little as they could, grabbed what they might, in the end turned with sneers from Samaria. Their patriotism was business; they worked for the Old and lived by the New. They left the former, peasants, young and poor and cursing; they went back with gold.. After all, there was no place like home.

Yet not all of the alien Fork were of these. Those there were, from the Northern lands of the Old World, who with the first emigrés' spirit had come to get, and give. Them the born sons of the new land met and married, though as yet they had not perfectly absorbed the other ones of Scandanavia, blue of eye and fresh of face, sturdy of hope, true of heart. This might have been a happy meeting.

The father of Andy was Norse, his mother American-bred. From Mandal, near Christiansand, he came, where — had you only seven-league eyes — you could see Denmark to the South of you; the Cattegat and Sweden to the East; more Viking country to the North; but a great vastness over all the West. Johnson, father, was a large, keen-visaged man. He had a weathered look, and a weary walk. His clothes never fitted; he didn't care.

His wife, the children's mother, looked tired, and worked tirelessly. New England ancestors had once owned property; she still had conscience. Were Andrew to describe her, he might have only said that she was good. She was good to them and they were good to her, if anybody thought about it. She knew the coming of a child, with clumsy hands to give it life; and what it meant to nurse that little one on starved-out hope, and slipping faith, and food that scarcely kept the spark alive in her, the mother.

The father aged and grew old in the crushing disappointment of his life, but in the woman still lived the spirit — fresh, strong, courageous. Yet in this freezing, God-abandoned corner of the land her days had changed. Her forbears were not rich, but free. She had existence, always poverty, often suffering.

While the husband marvelled, her courage and love still bloomed, like the sprig of bleeding-heart in its small, cracked jar that stood at one of her windows. He did not know it, but he loved the little plant which still flowered in a land where all things left that could and all the *past* was barren. Indeed, they felt no need of tenses. Hans promised well at first, and almost as soon the promise failed, his decency and virile manhood swallowed, bit by bit, by the swill which claimed at times the greater part of Slab Fork.

Men could not earn enough to keep their families, anyway, so as the rum helped them their families helped themselves. There was a box factory which lived on waste of the mill, and fed on a stock of women and childhood, the child from its school, the woman from home. The factory was a dust-filled, noisome place, cold as a barracks in winter, a parching hell in summer. Its pennies merely held the scales between a profit and a loss. Profit was life. They usually worked.

The workers had reached a stopping-place, though they did not know. They could feel it, perhaps, they must have, and sometimes Andy waked at night to cry out, in the darkness and the chill, until he touched his brother George beside him, or heard the heavy sleeping of the elder Hans across the room. For a while he would lie and stare up, unseeing, in the blackness of the room, the shingled ridges just above his head. Perhaps his father stirred uneasily and loudly on his hay-stuffed mattress in the room below; and then the eerie sougning of the wind across the shack might send him off again, to hear almost at once the early whistle of the mill, his mother hurrying about in her kitchen underneath. She was always hurrying, young Andy thought, hurrying and working, working and hurrying. But she put an arm about him, sometimes, to show that she was satisfied.

Except in mid-summer it was pitchy dark. Sometimes, for the moment before stepping shivering from bed, he wondered idly how long she had been up. Late at night he heard her at work, as in the morning, often a song upon her lips which lilted happily up, through boarded ceiling and pine-matched floor, while she washed the clothes that they would wear next day. He often wondered when she rested, but that he never knew till late. She and his father left the loft for their

sons, since the house, like the greater number of its kind, had just three rooms, if such you called that one where Andy and his brothers slept. There was a bit of stringy matting for the floor. The sides and sloping ceiling of the whole were bare and rough, with places in them where you scratched your head upon a nail, or saw by day a goodly chink of light between the loosely-fitted wood.

Their breakfasts did not differ much from dinners, since silence made the grace and and haste the sauce. It was generally a case of sour-raised bread and raw tomatoes, re-enforced at times by coffee-colored fluid which was hot. The master of the house and Hans stood not upon the order of their going. They were both large men, the son of the mould of the father. A gap of years separated Hans from the next, since there had been another little one who had not stayed to share their life. As his mother sometimes said, "George sorta favors me." But Andy's was the true complexion of the Norse, which means to those who know a head of curly yellow hair, eyes deep with all the color of the sea, and round, smooth cheeks as clear and pink those days as tender petals of an early-blooming flower. His limbs and body, straight, well-formed, assured strength. There was every chance for early use in the tasks which packed those hours between their breakfast and the coming of the night.

That was the portion of the day they all anticipated. The father's work was done, the mother's nearly, and the lolling heads of youth fell easy prey to the warmth that filled the room and made the rough shack home. The mother's face gloated with contented pride when all the coarse food disappeared with many a sincere, appreciative smack. The father backed his chair against the wall, carefully chose a

splinter from the ready wood-box, and let his wife remove her dishes to the tiny, crowded table in another corner of the room.

While she did the work they talked of a future which was brighter at night than at breakfast; when Hans had gone, of his wedding to the little Emmy just next door, and of what the wholesome child, although a woman here, might do for him where they had failed; and now of Andy, old enough to take his place in school "come fall." They expected much of Andy, since his mother, not rich in learning but more lucky in ambition, had already taught him how to read in simple words, and there were other things he knew.

And when her work was done, her man built up a hot pine fire in the little stove which warmed the small "spare room." There, sitting at their great extravagance, she played upon a small old organ quaint pieces learned as a girl. The father smoked a fummy pipe or whittled cut-plug, with now and then a snatch of hoarse Norse song. To placid mind and welling heart the clumsy fingering of "Comin' through the Rye" or "Annie Laurie" was as the finest chords that ever sprang to life from a Beethoven.

As tired fingers quit the keys the old man fell to musing of the days when he had been a soldier of this great Republic. Young, very young, to America, he yet had done a man's work in the "sixties." Those fiery struggles were dim, but he kept toward his flag an ardour and love as rarely splendid in the native-born as it is noble from adopted. And all of this the eldest of the house of Johnson was. Honorable and brave in war, the petty strife and selfish bickerings of peace, less understood, had found him timorous and vacillating, until his drifting stranded him at last at Slab Fork, to leave him high and dry. But in his tales,

were George and Andy old enough to see, their father was himself as he would never be again.

And Andy listened to his tales until the colorful Ben Hur, across from where he sat, assumed less hueful tints; the horses grew a blur upon the wall; and Hur was falling from his car. Whereat Andy himself dropped loudly from his chair, forgetting the picture entirely; which was usually the signal for the evening's end. A sharply-featured dawn leered early at the Fork.

IV

THERE came to the woods town a morning in May when the sun shone, and the cold was not, and the winds with their ear-aches and frost-touched fingers and toes had ceased to blow. It was spring. The birds were glad, and in their tuneful fashion lifted up their voices to the sky, and said so. The woodpecker set his wireless to "sending" on a tree-trunk near the mill; when a squirrel came out of the top, and sat on his haunches, and made a mock obeisance to the sun.

The children, those that could, were early at play, while the women sang as they toiled, in kitchen or garden patch. The men, as near daybreak they started out, cried back and forth in home-spun English, "Fine day!" "Yeh! Fine day, all day," and quite as if they meant it.

At Johnsons' none set out to toil, but all were busy. Holidays were two in Slab Fork, even in the coldest day of vacation was not yet, but the coming of freshly printed invitations had been sending a waiting train to Mrs. Hanson.

sons' right. These said, in rather an erratic type that might have been Old English but looked a great deal more like German script, that on this day, now come, would be the marriage of her daughter Emmy to Mr. Hans Anderson Johnson, both of Slab Fork. The groom's family breakfasted early as was usual, when dishes were cleansed with dispatch and somewhat hurried neatness.

While Hans and his father removed the parlor organ by their front room window and portaged it across the little square of yard to Emmy's, Andrew brought up with the stool, which was not so very massive, having sometime lost one-half the top. Though there was much to do, a day lay ahead, for the wedding service came that night at eight o'clock, someone once having vouchsafed in the hearing of good Mrs. Hanson that such was a fashionable hour. Six o'clock or high-noon weddings had never been tried on Slab Fork. If bride and groom and minister could possibly have slipped away to meet respective obligations, the mill and factory would certainly have yielded up no more, for guests. A crowd was the thing.

The pine-board doors of the Johnsons and Hansons sagged open from the morning, and their respective owners fetched and carried. A calico-shaded light, pride of the Johnsons, followed their organ, and Andy was proud to carry the breakable parts while George behind made shift with the shade. The Johnsons' dinner was eaten from the stove, and supper was served from the stove.

Uplifted, a pink tie, and
t as a bargain from a
in town, he quieted his
e bar. Glass in hand,
top, he responded with

drinks and cigars to numerous jests and coarser jesters. By close application, Hans shortly grew as witty as the best. He even made it warm for Wordy Bill. Bill that week was working on the night-shift, which left day-times free for talking. The songs and joking grew, for they and Hans looked on it as a final celebration in the spirituous. And there was much rejoicing.

At the house of his bride approached seven o'clock, and guests who wished to be sure of the show. Smallness marked the house as had generosity its invitations. Milady and her man, buxom daughters and sheepish sons, came early, converged upon the house, and entered it with giggling and much craning. Many an arm in faded brocade, or encased in a wear-worn coat, was sharply bulged out by paper-rolled bundles that gave off mystery. Wedding gifts were not discouraged here, aping a better world, and to the end there might be no mistakes each giver brought his present with him. In ones and twos or families of ten they entered the open door.

The bride? Was all but ready, so they whispered; "and waitin' for the groom," Bill Boddfish mentioned *sotto voce*. Soon after eight Hans came, some said a-leaning on his father's arm. He was red of face, and made his presence felt. This never caused a stir.

Nothing lacked. The organist was in her place, the bridal-party waited on the staircase. It was a steep and winding way, the top well hidden from below. Almost at once Andy sang out, "All ready," and anxious visitors had almost put their heads together across the foot or two of space reserved with difficulty for the nuptial way. Miss Myra Barnes was underneath the staircase. From broken stool and panting parlor organ she offered up in minor key her very best, "The Maiden's Prayer." The stairway creaked. Andy him-

self, in haste to see the end, was easily first. He landed on his hands. The "Prayer" perceptibly staggered. Then the squeak of the stairs attuned to the creak of the organ, so that one of several worthy women looking on was heard to murmur, "Ain't it grand?" and shed a tear.

Hans' collar yet contained the new pink-cloth crayat. Even this bride wore white. Likewise her maid of honor, and each held a clump of crimson, spotted flowers. They were artificial, but they were very red, and the bride — she had a gown that "rustled!" The best man was brave in a red sweater-vest and a nice blue ring just tattooed on a little finger. They pushed through the guests, losing step and finding it again, each marching as seemed good to him and rather careless of the music which was welling up and down in leaps and bounds that made Miss Myra's touch seem strange and sensitive, a wondrous thing. The Rev. Leonard Olson, severe and dark of coat and Sabbath manner, was watching for them in the parlor. The organ gave a parting wheeze.

The pastor's words came haltingly at times, but his success was ultimate. Religion was a side-line, its fees about a grub-stake for the church-mouse. So Reverend Olson strove at other things, mainly at nailing boxes. Boxes were his vocation, souls his avocation. On the whole, he was probably better at boxes, as there were now and then delays and gaps of knowledge in joining couples and depositing his dead. He seldom had a chance to use the blither service, though praised for doing thorough work. No one among his dozen nuptial-takers had later heard his wedding-bells die out in a divorce. Yet his charges were poor.

At length the shaky Hans had found his ring and

slipped it on her finger, and the Reverend One had said, "I call you man and wife." There was a little murmur of applause about the room. There was tear-letting, too, but in the main hardened old females and blushing young things bore up wonderfully, with usual sympathy extended to the mother of the bride. "Hearts and Flowers" was ground from the organ, and the world was glad.

Then at last the gifts were heaped on all the tables in the room, and those who still kept coigns of vantage on the chairs and sofas began to clamber down and look about. And what a gathering was there, for sure. The low ceiling fairly cracked with the clatter of all the shrill, unmusical voices, the patois, the accent and brogue; the high-pitched voices in all their unchecked stridency, as they are heard in little homes and in the far-wide places of the country. Belles of the Fork, Annie Jensen, Lizzie Berg, Anna Hanson, and Myrtle Mickelby, all were there; Joe Jensen and William Mickeluski, and even the stern old "Admirable" were of the merry-making. While the scolding mate of one, Ardella Hansen, for once in all her wretched life forgot to watch her husband in a very timely eagerness to see that thing the neighbors from next door had given. There was Big Business too, which for a space forgot great cares to mingle with its fellow-men again. Pop Baum had come to give his beery blessing, and even "old Doc" Wimple had left a poor, sick equine to be present. The house was honored.

Slab Fork's police force, Sandy Jackson, had left off his patrolling of the yard for half an hour that he might come, while Chapman Jones, who held rank sway above the Company's Hotel, was there, as was his head and only waitress, Miss Ophelia Claiborne, in much ado and real blue denim. She had humanly

that night postponed her dishes to another day to come with Louis Frank. The latter, of their local store, was greatly in demand, since he could lend a little light in cost of others' gifts. There he was, looking, talking, letting little escape. He had as many prices as there were wage-scales for the customers; and he didn't like to *give* even information. Thirsty Ed had projected his tell-tale presence part-way through the rear door, when he was easily induced by some refreshment to leave them for a time at least; and Wordy Bill was "talking scandal" to everyone with ears. One of the happiest of mortals there was Mr. Charlie Wall, Slab Fork's laughing undertaker. He had a very long and dank moustache. At sober times he smirked without its being seen. To those who may not know, Charlie it was who brought the "Fifty-Dollar Funeral" to Slab Fork, one of its cheapest boons and best. He had a sunny, buoyant soul, a man well-wrapped in his future. Just now he was inquiring with nice and no doubt actual concern as to the precise and present state of so-and-so's condition. He was ever thoughtful of the helpless, the infirm. He seemed alarmed, yet interested, in conning o'er the "shootin' rheumatiz" of poor old Mother Witzke.

Even Jack Larrabie, boss of the mill, was noted among those present. Admiring gifts, he now and then exclaimed "Jemima! I'll be swiggered if I ever seen the like o' that before!" Which was winning, as usually true, and givers right and left were apt to smile, quite audibly. Each donation was plainly marked, oh, very, and Mr. Larrabie, when all was said and done, was not a half-bad sort. He was as near all right as he could be and hold his job, and if at times he seemed even harder than the hand that encircled them all, you must remember he had once

been underneath himself. It is a school which shrivels hearts.

Some of the gifts were elaborate, and nearly all were interesting. From bridegroom to bride had come a crayon drawing of self, a local artist's work. And she had given him a pair of cotton blankets, with an accordion. The mother of the bride had brought an old-time print of "Every Man His Own Physician." The groom's own mother had made for them a book of home-tried recipes, each one a gem of doing much with little, the while his father had contributed a large round cheese and steel engraving of Niagara Falls. One friend had sent five yards of sheeting, another chickens, with a pair of towels; a dear old lady brought a rather skimpy piece of quilting — yet made entirely of cast-off clothing of the groom. A maiden aunt of Emmy's, down in Mapleton, had sent them by the logging-train a large tin canister of quite efficient, withal slippery, soap. She had made it herself; she said it would "do up" anything. There were others: dishes and vases and handkerchiefs; shoes for the bride and gum-boots for the groom; a salt and pepper service *sans* the salt; one or two pitchers with chips and cracks, yet still tricked out to hold; knitted wash-cloths, hand-stitched towels, a "comforter"; even a large, nicked bowl which Mrs. Minsky brought (as if everyone hadn't known it without the poor soul's name). It had been a very nice bowl, probably for fruit. She never had any, so she thought she'd pass it on, "wishin' 'm luck."

There was ware of silver, some of it like to hold its pale gray flush until the morrow. And in Mrs. Minsky's bowl, because the largest, were quarters and dimes, a half or two, and even a dollar, from those who had no other thing to bring. More silver came

its clinking way as dancing started up to Myra's jingling "Old Gum Stump" and "Shake a Leg, Mariar." When the gallant well-to-do had a kiss and a dance with the bride of Hans, and in token thereof threw much largess in the dish. Emmy blushed, though the bowl was half-way filled, and there was much rejoicing.

To one side Andy served the older, stiffer ones with resinous beer and limp cake, while their sons and daughters trod a measure. His father kept it flowing from the keg and held the drinkers in a friendly mood with many an ill-remembered joke and tale. The jokes were stale, the beer was fresh. They went down well together. Anyhow, they were so happy it hardly mattered what you told them. Hans' mother, here and everywhere, looked to the comfort of their guests and seemed to have a deeper pleasure in the laughter of the others. It was loud, usually rude, and sincere.

Laughing and dancing, dancing and drinking, cake, cut-plug and beer. Some sipped because they danced, the rest because they could not. All soon fetched twelve. The boss had long since gone, but here and everywhere still fluttered out the coat-tails of the merry undertaker. Those coat-tails, how they danced to the old, and their wants; how zealous and careful of the lame, the halt, and the drinking. Charlie oozed kindness of this world, and promised even better.

As they had come, in ones and twos and tipsy little groups they left. Andy and the rest stayed on to straighten things around. Nothing was put off till tomorrow, tomorrow being more of today. Finally all was done. The Johnsons went on home and Andy to bed, before their fire downstairs. It was no longer very cold; the dirt floor thinly blanketed would do.

Long after the others beside him slept he heard from the loft the nervous voice of the little girl, and now and again the rough, hard tones of the groom.

V

AT noon of the following day a siren, high-up from its place on the ridge of the mill, sent out its kindest summons to all laborers below — to quit; to lay off from their task, and for the space of one-half hour store up new energy to take them through another six. Shortly before a smaller blast apprised the ones inside the mill itself that power would *stop* as soon as “Flapjack” Boddfish, engineer, could throw his switch. What it was most of them knew not, none of them cared. A shut-down was never unwelcome; hang the cause!

A moment earlier a very sturdy log of old white pine had ridden up the bull chain. Old Johnson threw it on the narrow wooden roll-way. Such thick-boled stuff men of the woods called “accidents.” Once the rule, the woodland round about the Fork was only thinly peppered with them now. The thicker log lay on the roll-way until the smaller ones ahead had run their course out on the carriage. Gleaming bandsaws tore the boards from logs that flashed their length but half a dozen times upon the track, then passed from sight, leaving new boards for edgers and trimmers, bark slabs for the burner that ever ate all which entered its fire-red maw.

It was the big one’s turn. Perhaps from the thick, crooked root-stub still clinging to its butt, there was delay in settling it upon the carriage that Hans and the two others rode. Hans was there, as usual, for there was a holiday to marry and another one to die. Honey-moons were not. Still elated and flushed with the happiness of his late venture, he was equally unsteadied and unnerved today.

The carriage stopped, the endless band screamed out impatiently in countless revolutions. Hans worked at the head, nearest the saw when the carriage was at rest. Cant-hook in hand, he now stepped quickly forward to roll the heavy trunk his way. While he did so a man at the other end of the thirty-foot stick cut away its one projecting root. Released, the log rolled quickly to the front and not unnaturally it found Hans off his guard. The hook fell from his hands and flew another way. He swayed uncertainly a moment, then screamed and fell. The log stopped when the man was carried with it, to the blade.

So the little whistle blew, and when the saw was stopped there was no need. It was sharp, and it was free. The boy's body was nearly in two and he was dead. The father fainted, though of men called tough; a douse of water was all he wanted. The smaller whistle blew, shrilly, impatiently, and the men were back at work. Others filled the places of father and son. They worked along just the same; soon they had the great log sliced; then it was noon.

To a corner behind the sawyer's pit first came the Doctor, without fault of his, miraculously near. Charlie Wall appeared on time. It was his job. He came in a lumber wagon. Just then the mill's loud siren blew noon, and he had help with his load. In the wagon it was covered loosely with a bit of sack, and Charlie drove along. He drove rapidly, being efficient. He reached the house before the father or the men. While he drove a little fleck of crimson appeared about the sides and bottom of his wagon-box; a stray dog sniffed at his rig. The horse jogged comfortably along.

They passed knots of men who had seen it, and nearly all had heard, news travelling quickly. One

who had not liked Hans looked at the passing cart, and laughed. He said that as for him he just "allowed as how that one'd be a darn-sight more of use to folks just that-a-way than if he'd hung around." There was a low, angry murmur when this was heard, for in their free-and-easy way Hans had been liked. Another said that that was "pretty brash" for *him*, stepped up, and struck the first across the face and felled him. The rest went home to dinner.

At the Johnsons' door the undertaker stopped. He and another got down. They rolled their burden on a plank, stepped briskly to the house, and as Andy opened at the knock of the man ahead they raised the plank a little at the sill, slid it across the room, and in Charlie's cheerful voice announced to those inside, "Wal, here he is!"

Then Andy ran to keep his mother from the door, for the canvas sack had slipped away. But she was there with Emmy, and little George. Johnson himself entered at the front as Emmy ran from the rear door, crying wildly. Andy's mother fainted, while George fell sobbing on the floor. They must have felt some loss, though ignorant.

Andy crossed the room. Putting an arm around his father's neck, he led him away from "it." Together they went to where the mother was lying. They lifted her and carried her away.

On a still, warm afternoon a few days later the body of him who had loved and wed, and lived and died in only a few poor hours, was deposited among the pine trees on a hill beyond the mill. The Rev. Leonard Olson came once more. It was a Sunday.

His spiritual comfort was ashes, although he said, in part, "the mother here will wait and watch no longer for her son when the toils of a day are done; the

father, robbed of his companionship, will struggle on alone where once they labored side by side; the wife, a wife for hours, a widow for the rest of time, will hark in vain at night, when the day's work is at an end, for the footsteps of the man she loved, and lost. And all may look, or they may listen, and he will come not." His words of healing smelled of the poor-souled, earth-daubed man who sees God from afar.

There were people outside, too. They were waiting to see "the box."

VI

It was a small, close-fitting building, even as such things go at the Fork, this graded school over whose dustiness Miss Myra Barnes was arbiter. Certainly she herself was as unresting energy. "My stars! how she does fly about," old women used to say. Indeed she did move nervously from place to place, and not unlike the dust that hovered over everything inside, dirt that a poor old janitress' broom never actually ousted but just stirred on.

It blanketed walls and the floors and the ink-wells. First duty for early-coming pupils was the furrowing of names in desk-tops covered fairly with the morning's coat. It was really quite remarkable that not a weed or two was seeding in a filth-blown corner. It was a pity, too, for Mother Minsky's man had been a very faithful laborer, and when he lost his job through being killed she and the dust had filled this berth persistently these many terms. The Company wished to do something. Who cared for rubbish in the school?

But it was not the dust on their desks that ever

really hindered. The dust of the mill and the mill town lay many years deep on their minds. It was a slowly-gathered pall. You did not move it with a brush; you could not make initials with it. It got in people's eyes. It thickened life. There was a great deal of it.

Miss Myra liked to hear "The Graded Slab Fork School," which was true. It came in two parts, one being the primary, the other elementary. Others called it what they liked, but few could give it a better name. In fact, it was "Miss Myra's." Herself a product of that town in the valley below, she had been dedicated early to a lifetime's teaching, nature not having gilded her as a lily, nor yet as the rose. No Mapleton affording that latitude she sought for in her inmost soul, she had come years since to the town in the hills, bringing her ambitions with her. They both stayed. She came to create, a school; and she stayed, to dictate. The Fork was better for her. Socially, Miss Barnes had good demand. In music's realm she constituted Slab Fork's all-in-all. She organed them to wedlock, played for the church, gave them material for dancing, and finally, at least in very urgent cases, could sing for them, ah, sadly, at the end.

When Andy entered this school he was nudging eight, and in the course of his first year there he probably evinced neither more nor less ability than the remainder of the little Bergs, and Mickelbys, and Hansons, who cluttered up the place. Indeed, he was more than once allowed to stay behind at night for fighting. There was a boy named Harry Larrabie, a stocky ten-year old who was the "little boss's" son, and by that token and his own fair size a kind of bully-born among the children. Yet when this lad had said to another from out a hard boy-heart that Andy's dad couldn't be

much of a soldier to work on a bull-chain now, which certainly was not heroic, Andy had picked himself a billet from the wood pile and eased it down on Harry's head. To the end that others were edified, and Harry wore a bump.

The autumn went and the shivering, pinching chill of the winter came while Andy went to school; and in mid-winter he stayed away two months for school was closed, since education was a seasonable thing in Slab Fork and a single rusted stove, although quite full, could not suffice to keep the clapboard building warm. In spring it would open again; by summer the children were ready for box-work.

It was a tight winter, even as such things go in the wooded hills of northern Hamlin County. Feet were frozen within the mill, and out among the board-piles in the yard; and in the houses old women hugged the stoves while chills clutched them; the younger moved about in shawls, with clumsy frost-marked fingers. Clothing lacked. Sometimes the larder ran low and there was talk, among the men. The Company had seen its like before; it looked for things to slacken with the coming of the thaws.

Emmy went back to live next door. Mrs Johnson came and went with many dishes — "I just ran over with this; we had so much we just *couldn't* eat it" — a state of affairs that had probably never existed except in her mind; and Andy fetched them, often, bundles of pine-knots and air-dried fagots. Winter settled a grizzly hand. It had time in plenty. The Company, business-like and anxious to get rid of all the "dead-wood," would gladly have sent the Hansons out of its house at the first passed rent; but Larrabie somehow forbore, at least for a time. It might have brought an undesirable effect just then.

In mid-winter good Dame Fortune smiled upon the Hanson woman and her daughter, for the Company paid its death benefit in full on Hans. You must know that for everyone who gave his life in serving them the Company would pay his widow or his children, and there were nearly always both, one hundred dollars, cash. If after that they came to want, surely it had scrubbed off its hands.

Winter ultimately waned, as this hundred of money passed to the Store, and flamed in their lamp and sat upon their table. It was well; the present was enough, in Slab Fork. Maybe the God would help them, though they had never looked to Him. Somehow He seemed a long journey away. Among the men there was a little talk. Some spoke of the accident, others of the women; a few, thinking, of *rights*. But what were they?

One night there came to the Hansons a caller, to whom many looked up and some called "Brother." Parentally dubbed Cosmopolis Thorn, he came from none knew where. Of course he worked. The Company, it was said, looked upon him as about pure fool, but if the men agreed with this they did not say so, since he was treated decently and conspicuously, often as "Mr." Thorn. Conspicuously, for *Mr.* was reserved for the minister when he was not in the box-factory, and the owner if he were present. When the talk was of the latter, it was just "the damned Old Man."

As to the "Brother," the men for about a year had been starting up among themselves a kind of semi-secret brotherhood. They called it Eureka Lodge. In the beginning the Company approved, in fact had tacitly encouraged it: "for the promotion of good-fellowship and sociability," the Charter read. As the

Old Man aptly stated when Jack had put it up to him one day in Mapleton, "Let 'em have it; give 'em something to think about. Shouldn't cost us anything. Even save a bit. C'n step in when we like."

Eureka grew and flourished and soon had passed original expectations. The Company at first had paid but scant attention. They only knew or thought of it as once-a-month or so assemblies of their men, foregathered in the Social Hall that had gone up about a generation back for goodness knows just what. The "Lodge" waxed fat. It swelled with the interest of many, but the credit mostly went to "Cosmo" Thorn. He certainly filled a place among men who had opinions and beliefs a-plenty, but did not know what to do about it.

When their caller had quitted the Hansons he left behind a little bag of money, exchanged for fresh ideas.

A few days later, it was pushing the first of May, Andy was restless when he had finished supper and had satisfactorily performed his part in the general order of things. It had been a trying day, all around. Early that morning his father had fallen and injured himself at the mill; not badly, just enough to dock his pay for three, four days or a week. On top of that he, Andy, had gone to school, where he had had to lick a boy who trampled on his rights, also his cap, at recess. He had not emerged unscathed when the teacher whipped him in school, so that his fruits of victory were very near to ashes.

Lessons he had had about as usual, yet as a whole his day had dragged. The night at least was fine. He would go out. Leaving by the door at the front, and lightly hopping the low slab fence that bordered his house toward the road, Andy swerved to the right and headed away from the mill.

As he turned, he saw it sending showers of incandescent sparks about, some red, some white, all dulling as they swept above the stacks. Smoke darkened the sight of the mill below, noise fixed it strongly in the hearer's mind, as now and again hoarse calls or shriller yells broke away from the greater clamor that filled the still blacker building and overflowed in failing echoes sent out to lose themselves in night. Black ants, the men, in their still blacker hole, thought Andy. He did not think that ants are self-governed. They were working hard tonight, for logs were coming in a steady stream, and the owner had just got an order which was good for several months.

Behind the boy was nervous life and restless din; nearer, he could have heard great shaggy men curse tools, machines, each other in a very dispassionate way. Ahead was sober darkness for the most part, and the night-lent quiet of dark forest places. Here and there faint lights peeped from small-sashed windows; a dog lifted his head to bay at the thin sickle of a moon which sent its first, pale-saffron rays between and through the scraggy branches of a lone, upstanding pine across the town.

Some of that night's splendor reached in to the boy. For a space the spot was obscured where men like mill "culls" warped and shrank, and did not know nor care. The poor, small town transcended itself. The boy felt it. His spirits rose in cadence to a breeze that made a soothing music in the trees along his path.

A light flared brightly ahead. The boy came near, seeing it burned in Social Hall. What was afoot tonight? The place was seldom lighted, and he had heard no talk of any dance; unless — yes, that was it, Eureka met that night! Skirting the front of the shack, he slid boylike to a corner. Here, he knew, a

hole existed. He had peeked through, and blown in peas during Bible School one Sunday. Not stopping to consider the right or wrongness of his plan, he pushed through the weeds, close to his corner, and listened. Then he looked.

Yes, he was right. They were in session now. Late arrivals were even entering, for now and then the single door in front creaked, opened, then as quickly closed. A buzz of conversation and occasionally a grating word or syllable reached out to him. It was new, and it was therefore very interesting.

The other boys could hardly know what they were missing. He would have to tell them all tomorrow.

VII

"WHO is there?" cried a voice in the front of the room. Andy could see that the challenge came from a person dressed in a dirty, torn robe, with a thick stick in his hand.

Another voice said, "La — "; "— bor," replied the first, the keeper of the door. "Come in."

They came mostly one-by-one, and as they knocked, paused at the door, and were passed, they went toward the front, and through a smoke-haze of pipe and cigarette clouds Andy saw there many whom he knew. So far back at his end as to be hid from sight, addressed as "Chief" by those who entered and saluted, Andy knew more from the voice replying to the men than from what he might see that this Chief was Cosmopolis Thorn. Three other chairs were ranged about the hall a little higher than the rest. As each

man entered he saluted the Chief, then passed in succession around the hall, from the first to the third of the others. Andy knew from what had filtered through his crack that the lesser three were styled the first, second, and third "Autocrats." Just what did that mean? He didn't know.

Something pounded at the Chief's end, and Thorn's voice rose while conversation stopped. There seemed to be preliminaries they all passed through together, when Thorn's voice was heard again and all sat down.

"Brothers of Eureka, we are here tonight to consider a number of matters. The first of them is sufficiently important to affect each one of us; and after us, our people.

"Last week at your request I called upon the widow of our recent member, Hans Johnson. I find that the Company, after a wait of six months, maintains its policy of giving *one hundred dollars cash* to the survivors and dependants of those thoroughly mauled, or else killed outright in its service.

"Mrs. Johnson and her mother had received the hundred about a month before. Of course, with unpaid bills from Hans' death and burial, the widow's got but mighty little of it left now. As you said, therefore, I left some money from our common fund with them. And, I have certainly determined to land some scheme to wrestle from this company of ours some *justice*, where and when that much is due."

Cries of "Yeh! Yeh!" and noise of hand-clapping was thereupon evident, as was the fact that Thorn had reached a timely topic when he invited some opinions from the rest. Discussions rose.

Admirable Rogers had the floor. Andy was surprised to see him there, yet the old man was at ease in a respectful silence.

"Brothers," Rogers began, his voice vibrating, "I guess, if you knew, I've got at least as big a grudge to settle up as anybody here. 'Grudge,' though, it ain't, not by a hot shot. All we want, and all we're ever goin' to ask, is justice! right pay! and a little common, ordinary decency for us and our families! It's mighty little.

"We, you and I, haven't had none of these, times past. In the future we're goin' to get 'em all!"

The voice of the old man rose, and the flickering light of the hall cast a warming glow on his head, bended with hardship, whitened with age. He radiated light; it seemed almost a sign.

Great shouts, "You bet we will!" made the clap-trap building shake, and Thorn rapped hard with his gavel for more caution in their demonstrations.

Then said the old man, "Probably we're just about as poorly fixed, one way, as any men could be. There aren't any big sinews of organization bindin' together the fellows of our woods, no more the mill. We're like a kid tryin' to run afore it hardly walks. I don't think our time is here, not quite. I'm for action, all right, but we've got to hustle slowly."

The Admirable stopped, with a generally approving murmur from those who are always convinced by the last speaker. A few thought, nevertheless, he went at things too easily.

So up rose Arthur Witzke, whom rumor connected with the founding of their lodge, as it had Cosmopolis with its organization.

"Brothers" — and it was no longer in the mumbled English of the poor old ravelled fellow who sat down, but in a jargon of a man who looked, with half an eye, what comfortable folk must call an agitator.

"Brothers! In my own country, *Polen*, we have

had long to work for the cause — justice and liberty. Those causes have much suffered, and so we have, my brothers. *Deutschland, Oestreich*, another, it does not matter. It is the same always. They grind us down, they wear us out, old shoe for the world to walk on. The people, they are pounded down; and they are never the less poor!

"One year back am I in London. It was on a May-Day, not far off here, the first of the month. But May-Day there had different. Red flags they have, and the police, they dare do nothing. In all the parks men spik as they choose. Nobody there was who dared say to them 'NO!' The police are there. They only look. They try nothing.

"Then, I remember, speaks one man, and he say 'What we care for country? — something only to work for; or what we say of love of country? — something only to fight for. Love for the *countryman*, that is what! and let the country look for itself!"

There jumped up a man the boy could not at first see clearly, though he was quick to recognize the voice. The words came crookedly enough, but there was nothing wrong with them. When he had come the boy didn't know; it was his father.

"I have been," the old chap cried, "in this country for nearly fifty years. I have suffered for it, fought for it, by god! and I have never had regret.

"Blame the guilty, if you like, my Brothers, but never to forget the flag that covers innocent. It is a fine flag, a wonderful flag. For it I would die. Red flags, might be, fill pockets. Our flag fills hearts, means everything — big things in men's minds, love in women's hearts, good blood in bodies, strength, great strength in souls." His voice rang out.

"Brotherhood of man? It only wins *for man* where

country comes before, and men behind. The love of country? It is everything! It is no more to blame for Holden Gates than us ourselves. I have fought for this flag once, many times. Again would I do so. Let us plan, but not forget. Foreign ways are not of ours in the native land."

Applause roared out, the old man sank down, tired. Witzke looked sour, and thought of something to say. But Bill Boddish had the floor. Bill had tact, with something of humor, and it is possible was simply warding off Witzke. The agitator, if such, was self-opinionated, clung tenaciously to his conclusions and was careless of the rest and theirs. Also, to return to the last of the speakers, Bill had been drinking. Most of them did at times. When Bill drank he saw himself peculiarly oppressed.

"Brothers," said he, "and Chief, a little while back I was a-lookin' at a paper of a night, and I seen mention made of some all-fired old feller down the State as had just a-bought a nine thousand dollar — what? A nine thousand dollar dog-collar! When I read it I knowed I knowed that guy, and sure enough, if it wan't our own 'Old Man.'"

"And I sat there and thank of the idacity of a feller to get a dog-collar that-a-way; and for a *dog*! I felt kinda sick to my stummick. And, I says, 'Ain't that ignorant?' If I had a been down there in Mapleton about that time, I bet I'd a snuck up behind that dog, and I bet they'd a had to have the muni-cipal policeman out to kep me from a doin' what I'd liked to.

"'Tain't like me, 'tain't at all. I mebbe was born once with a plated spoon in my mouth, but I bit the handle offen it — right quick! You bet.

"Puts me in mind o' something else. I disremember now just what it was, but anyways I says, 'Here is a

pretty howdy-do.' An' I says — Damn! What was it I says, anyways, Joe?"

A good many laughed and Thorn rapped sharply on his table. The recalcitrant Bill, when he would go on, found himself well-seated next to Joe, and with some final forms the meeting closed, not very prodigal in result or agreement. But when Thorn and Witzke left, a child with half an eye could see that they were satisfied.

Dimming lights and trampling men roused Andrew, and just enough of caution lasted in the sleepy boy to hinder his return till things were quiet. Going by a back way, he clambered the fence while his father fumbled at the door. Expectant of abuse the boy was quiet, but the father scarcely saw him. Andy had thought to tell him, but the elder's stern face dissuaded him as he limped inside and bade the boy good-night.

VIII

ANDY thought for a day of the meeting. New things came up, and in time he completely forgot it.

If the men remembered at May-day, at least they gave no sign that he could see, and soon the school had closed, for June was come. The season that to other boys spelled rest and vacation, swimming, and camping, and tramping, meant to the lad only a change of work. Idleness was a condition Slab Fork had never tolerated; it could not afford it. When school closed one entered the box factory, swept the mill, or tried a hand at cleaning up the yard. The last was healthful, and there was little of it.

Andy made boxes, for he was strong and growing

and the next year would be ten. The box factory never paid so well in coin, but anything was something. Sometimes it sent its boys and women home with twisted fingers or saw-bit hands, and nearly always at night with lame backs and sorry hearts. But what were any of these, or all of them in fact, just so a body still could work?

Andy began with the strength of nine and the energy of more, to the end that now and again his wages rose to thirty cents a day. People there worked by the piece. As work went up, rates slid down, for it did not do to earn too much. They might get wrong ideas.

He started with plenty of health, spirits, and ardor. Most of them did. He pulled square, shook-laden trucks through and about the plant; he trimmed the ends from boards and sized the boards for cases; and more than once he glued the boxes or worked about machines that sealed the ends with grooves or nails. The boy liked it, this sense of making money, and when pay-day neared in mid-July he used to speculate on how he might get rid of all that he had made. For Andy could have a dollar of his wages, every week. Only the rest would go to his mother, though mostly folks felt — and maybe rightly — that all their children earned belonged to them. It was a case of bread, not ethics.

The boy worked happily, and though he waked tired and breakfasted half-heartedly and went to bed again at night with ears and head that thrummed to the roar of the mill, limbs that ached with its tasks, he got along, since he was doing something for himself. Because he had known no foolish philosophy of doing something for the other fellow, he felt no reason why he might not dream dreams or sing at his work. He liked it.

Now Andy knew that in their life the Company gave dispensation for two full holidays in each and every year. With it they gave their blessing to one and all, but no wages, for indeed there is a limit. In return they only asked that nobody get so drunk those days as to be sick the next. Here Andy recollected that in the normal course of men and things the next great day, come soon, would be the Fourth.

His father, rarely, told of other Fourths that he had known, and judging by his tales the day had sometime had a meaning. Though the dry-rot of the Fork had never sapped completely his remembrance, this man would certainly have been far less than human if the spirituous fervor of that day of the woods had not caused a rebirth of much he once felt. The day meant little now but getting drunk, and men came in from woods and far-off camps to meet the others of the town who had quit on the night before. There were always old friends, and fights, and subsequently bone-dry throats and long-drawn faces to be taken home. Rather naturally, Andy looked half-heartedly upon a day in which he was not old enough to take a very active part. In Mapleton, he heard a man say once, there was speaking and parading and a band, things called fire-crackers and torpedoes, too, which must have been good fun even if they failed to make as great an outcry as the pistols and the shotguns which he knew.

With early morning the mill's siren was still, but in its place there rose to greet the sun the bark and snap of rifles up towards Baum's, where rows of men fresh from the woods had come to quaff the customary drink that opened eyes, and was the Slab Fork peep-o'-day for most, in even ordinary times. They breakfasted late that morning, at Andy's, and it was after

eight o'clock when he had done his share of stacking and washing the dishes and filling the wood box with slabs from the yard, which last lay quite conveniently across the road from home.

Mid-morning saw Andy on his back beside a pine-tree near the river, tiring of the noise behind and wishful of a change. The woods rose up around him, fresh and cool, damp, too, and odorous with the oily smell of the needles that lay upon the forest floor and softened the bumps of his couch. It was ideal "poor man's weather," where the rain meant lay-offs.

Birds called across the weaving tops of the pines, while here and there, far out, now close to shore, a fish rose undisturbed to send a little swirl of curling ripples along the silent places of the stream. Had he been older he would no doubt have thought great things through the nearness of a Nature more often wonderful than understood. Being but a boy, and of Slab Fork, with some ten winters and nine summers to his credit, he was probably not greatly inspired, but satisfied and soothed, by mysteries he could not solve, and did not wish to.

His dreaming took form in a nap, to such good purpose that when a chipmunk from on top let fall a seed which struck his head, and followed it up with a torrent of squirrel-like abuse, he awoke of a sudden to find himself feeling like dinner. The rays of the sun struck straight downward on the trees, and he knew his feelings had not played him tricks, as boyish stomachs do. Thereupon he got him home without delay. But after dinner, so unaccustomed was he to the *feel* of holidays, he walked about the lumber piles and sawdust streets for possibly an hour or more without encountering that thing of which he was in search, just fun. True, now and then an incident occurred

which served to gild his day. Up near the Hall a drunken fellow from the woods had fired the fuse of a giant cracker, held in one hand, by the light of a short cigar in the other. The cracker spluttered in his hand, apparently went out, and then shot off with such a roar that women screamed and boys yelled out in nervous glee. Then other men came running up to see the 'jack gaze stupidly upon a wrist and some of what had been a hand. But they fetched turpentine, bound up the stump, gave its owner a drink, and hurried him off.

In the Hall near-by the din of a dance had been progressing undisturbed. From a corner window Andy saw stout fellows in checkered suits and bagging pants dance awkwardly but happily enough with some young women of the town, who tittered and choked when the strains of the lone organ and drum died down and their sweating swains led them to a place where something frothingly yellow ran in an endless stream from a very large, black keg. It fell, when it did not spill, into roomy mugs held shakily below, and when the cups were emptied of their draught the music set tirelessly to work anew and the drinking gave way for a spell to waltzes and two-steps done in the ways of the woods, which you must know are first of all home-made. There were other boys around, some smoking cigarettes, others just loitering until some kindly soul or elder brother passed out a portion of the beer.

Andy did not relish beer, as he had never tasted it. A little later he decided for a walk. He started out beyond the yard, then followed the track that led to the station. Where the wagon road turned south for Mapleton there was a car, an automobile. One man sat in it, beside a wheel. An older one, with a

cap and long tan coat, was standing to one side. He was talking with Larrabie, the only one among the group that Andrew knew. A little ahead of the car two women and a little girl were slowly walking. Now and again they stopped in their stroll, while the more apparent of the older persons looked back impatiently.

Cars were not common. Roads were ultra-poor, which did not matter greatly as there was no one to ride them anyway. Andy sidled past, as close as he dared. He thought of asking questions of the one inside the car, who looked a friendly sort, but the man with Mr. Larrabie glanced up and Andrew changed his mind. Walking more rapidly, he was shortly even with the three pedestrians. Not knowing them he felt at liberty to gratify his curiosity, which he took out in staring. One seemed young, strong, rather fattish, and was bright with color; the other grown-up looked very neutral. She was drab, and said little; must be a grandmother or something, he thought. He did not know some folks have nurses.

It was the third among them, though, that held attention longest. He did not know just what she was. She seemed to be a little girl, and very pretty, maybe a foreigner. She might be six or seven, ten or twelve. The little Bergs and Wickstroms that he knew were not an index. Her hair was dark, with dainty ribbons. She was carrying a flowery hat which dangled from one hand. There were other ribbons on the hat. She was very airy, so bright and sweet-looking too. He thought perhaps he would like her; but he was more afraid of her. Accordingly he hesitated.

The older lady did not, that gay, rich-looking one. She had been walking on ahead and treading most judiciously upon the sawdust of the road. By right of snug shoes made for riding or an innate squeamishness, she

always seemed ready to step on a nail. Andy had seen his mother walk like that when she was looking out behind his house for eggs.

Now turning, this other person called, quite sharply, "Come, come, Barbara, don't keep *so far* behind!" The little girl jumped, as she had in turn been virtuously appraising the odd-appearing lad. Balked in an attempt to classify, she hurried on.

Very shortly the machine with the two men caught up with them, the others entered it and soon were gone. A cloud of thick dust that gradually cleared was the last that he saw of a very red car.

When he got home he thought of speaking to his mother about a very small and pretty girl that made him think of angels. His mother was paring potatoes, very thin, and he gave up the plan.

By night crowds gathered from the camps outside and when Andy, still wandering, peeped in the door of Baum's, he found the Drug Store crowded to its walls with swearing, jostling men; and now and then one issued forth to find a place of comfort and convenience on the ground before the door. Strangers were there, others he knew, men, some women too. A cheap piano rattled rebelliously; the crowds laughed. The men were of woods and mill. They took their Fourth in terms of booze and women, both bad.

Andy heard one great fellow say to the rest by the piano, "Who were the best man here 'fore *I* come in?" Someone from behind tapped him with a bottle, settling the bet.

The men were frank about it all. They brought money to see a woman again, and drink. They were honestly picturesque, with their colored shirts and bulging pants, crushed-up hats and the shapeless high-top boots that met their trousers at the knee. They

were exactly what they looked. Their women were birds of passage. They were smooth with talc, glary with color. They had animal beauty and human appeal for the locally fastidious, if drunk enough. One or two of them had fairly decent bodies. Their faces were nicely prepared, their clothes too fine. Their hands were cold and hard, but they had very polished nails.

The 'jacks did not expect to keep their pocketbooks.

The old Admirable, no longer his sombre self, was the center of an interested group, much as in his other days, if what men said were true, folk of another sort had heard him quite respectfully in different places. But he had slipped and fallen, even as he now seemed on the verge of dropping from the chair-seat where he stood by grace of luck. The old fellow had tasted deep of the spirit of the day, but younger men encouraged as often as his glass went dry.

In return he seemed to entertain them, vastly, for the old Admirable could be witty and rather disgustingly funny to boot when in his cups. Witzke, the ever uneasy, was saying, "Give us that little song you wrote the other day." The old fellow, as he balanced there with a glass in one hand and a flag, yes, Andy saw it was a flag, *his* flag, in the other, seemed not to understand. But the other was patient, and his insolence finally bored through poor old Roger's drink-dulled mind. When the rest had quieted a little the old fellow straightened his back, his voice rose quavering and queer.

The flag of the Fourth waved in one hand, his glass kept up the time. The words reached out to the boy. What the tune was he did not know. Presumably the author made it as he went along, though indeed it was a medley. The words seemed mixed, not dainty. The

crowd didn't mind and they, of whom Witzke was center, persisted until he was sung quite dry.

Admirable Jack was not a singer and his rhyme would not hold water, but it took the crowd, as it was of them. It was something like —

*"Though Hunyaks, men say, are far and away
The poorest damned trash in this town,
Though they curse, though they fight, though they
often are tight
They've got feelings, with guts, deeper down."*

"Yeh! Good! Go on, go on," they yelled, so —

*"Work levels all men, and lays upon them
The knocks and the struggles, the ups and the downs,
Till the days with their nights, the wrongs and their
fights,
Might bring other times, better fellows, around."*

"Another! Give us another." Obliging he went along —

*"It isn't the labor, the cold or the heat,
It isn't the blows and the curses that sound,
It isn't low wages that grind to the bone —
It's the devil-built System that's knuckling us down."*

"Yeh, Yeh! Set 'em up for the Admirable," came from the crowd.

He waved his flag in an excess of zeal and the success of his effort, which together brought him and his flag and his empty glass to a quick, unfortunate *finale*. The glass broke to bits under his feet, many stooped to succor the fallen singer, and Witzke profited by the confusion to right and step upon the chair.

Drunk, he could still "agitate." He talked wildly of

the men, and the Fourth, and at last the flag he had plucked from the floor. His words came rather disconnectedly and no one noticed much, till with an oath he threw the flag away, and spit upon it. Then a hand reached out. It cast him crashing from the chair, and Andy saw his father in a group of yelling men.

Things grew blurred. Glasses and bottles flew. Finally the throng gave way and good Bill Boddfish tottered out with Sandy Jackson, the right arm of the law, and in between them Andy's father. The noise, hardly broken, kept on inside, but the boy had seen enough. He reached home first, to overhear Sandy say at the gate, "Good man! Johnson."

His father entered, and the others left.

A cloudy morning; empty bottles and well-filled men lying about the board piles, and the street; money strayed, sense flown. The bottles laid there. Men slowly gathered themselves together and left for the woods or their work. Many had spent their Fourth in town. It was a great success.

IX

"'WHEN in the course of human events . . . a decent respect to . . . we hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; they are endowed by the Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. . . .'

"This, ladies and gentlemen, was the rich gift of some forefathers to their children. It was their bargain with posterity's future. Hev we tried to do our share? Hev we? There have been times, I say, when Justice

has almost fell down from her chair. The pursuit of happiness has almost ended in a riot, liberty made a by-word, life hardly worth living. Discouragements have piled up fast and almost overcame us.

"They said, 'Prudence indeed will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; . . .'

"But if this be so, did it persuade them, did it hold them back? No, not one! One hundred times no! Like them, we should get up and say:

" 'For the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.' "

So rolled the famous words of time from the grimly, queerly puckered lips of Benjamin Bergland Bronson. The day was Slab Fork's graduation, and "B. B." was "oratin'" for the school. His effort, the teacher maintained, was his own, though the sentences and phrases which followed one another rapidly and trickled out in now the treble, next the bass, of the awkwardly slipping voice seemed strongly tintured with the Declaration; in fact, the latter seemed but weakly watered with the words of his oratin'.

But who cared? Not Benjy's mother, certainly. Quotation marks do not disfigure in a speech, they rather emphasize, and so there was no way for her to tell just what was his and which was not. So she set it down to him, *in toto*, in the way of all good mamas. The teacher was pleased — she had had a finger or two in Benjy's oratorical pie; none of the fellow-graduates or other scholars were disturbed by the words in the least. Declarations and Constitutions and Magnae Chartae seldom troubled Slab Fork. They got lost in the woods. Progress and literature

alike were typified and lived in countless pages of unused mail order catalogues which lay beside the family Bible on the table. Only often there was not a table, and frequently no Book.

Apart from Benjy's words, the others were glad to keep pace with his gestures which, boylike, were seldom packed with grace. Evidently they had been caught from meetings at the church. The Rev. Olson was an eloquent man. He drove nails into boxes at the factory; he handled words the same way at the church.

Benjy's effort, on — "Man, His Rights" — had "took." Written by Continentals, reinforced by Olson, shot straight at them by Benjy, it held his hearers to a tardy end. A little girl declaimed upon the modern trend of Shakespeare, though about as near as they had ever reached that Muse of Men was in the weekly verses of "The Village Blacksmith" which were published in the *Crier*, Mapleton. There was a boy, also, who had his way on "Suffrage and Ancient History; Then, and Now." Myra's fine hand made the day.

But Benjy was the only one who talked of love of country. Stripped of historic trimming, Benjy's effort would have been an empty shell. Given as it was, it had impressed the younger Andy quite profoundly, for he had always liked the other. Benjy never picked on smaller boys, he was too big. Accordingly, Andy listened raptly and comprehended some. A little soaked in, and the words of the *proclamation immortal*, so different in meaning and tone, filled him with pride of the past and a glimpse of the spirit which could burst out unafraid in men without even a country — only, it seemed, to gradually lower and simmer as the country rose strong from its cradle.

Why, then, this failing in his country's growth? Ah, but he knew. He had heard old Rogers say, once on a

time, that if they all had kept in one band as they started, the spirit of 1776 might have been the spirit of 1876, no end. Some men went up, but most came down. Many tumbled, a few got pushed. As the old fellow had put it, "This country won't never amount to *shucks* until her gifts return to *all* her people, with well-filled lives, a share of liberty, yes, and 'the pursuit of happiness' — with an even chance of catchin' up with it."

Miss Myra's voice broke up his study and he awoke to see the pigtail of the little girl in front. Just as he heard a touch of asperity sound in the second summons of his teacher, the little tow-haired girl turned well around.

"Andy, Andy! go an' get yours!"

And when he came to, he found himself receiving the diploma of the Slab Fork school. He had been to school, if off-and-on, a long, long spell — for Slab Fork — and he realized that now at last was he master indeed of lots of the law, if none of the profits, as such bosh went up there. He'd show it to his friend Bill Boddfish, who would hand it back and surely say he "had forgot his glasses." And the knowledge of all that he knew appalled him. He walked home with a proudly conscious mind and a royally happy heart, his mother with him. At their gate she kissed him, and they went in together.

She kissed the *boy* good-by. He was ripe for the Mill.

The summer ate deep in that one day's pride. It took toll of his youth and made sport of his learning. It molded him to suit machines which ran by the power of the System — that they might run and work and mold for It.

It calloused his hands and hardened his heart and made his mind afraid. The spirit of the boy was hovering to wing away, and the look of the impotent earner got ready to replace it. Lines came that are sketched by the hand of long hours and monotonous toil, and of the spirit which is not Hope. Her name is Luck, and "workin' against the odds;" working not for something that will be, but simply that which is. The boy fed his machines; fed the endless chain and iron jaws with wood; fed them with the right of boys to boyhood; with the wish for better, and the hope for nothing worse.

His mother saw. To his father the lad grew more manly as his envelope each month became a little thicker and the son a little thinner.

One night voices in the tiny living-room below kept him awake; he heard his name; the sound of his father speaking, his mother's reply. Other nights there were when talk was late and days when there was even more economy, upon their table less of what one needed to keep poor bodies all alive. If the bodies could go on, it was enough. Souls were well enough for those who could afford them.

Fall reached them early in the North, where the short summer's heat could torture just as hard but not so long as the winters which held the workers and their huts in frosty teeth. There was a day when Andy stayed at home and on toward night he packed a few worn clothes, the way his father said. Together they left Slab Fork, on the railroad which every day at dark turned down to a town below. His father said to bid the rest good-by. He kissed his brother, but his mother almost smothered him.

The brothers of Eureka met again that night.

Another year of the Lodge was up, so that they paid

their dues as Witzke bade them, as they had done before. Their numbers had grown, with feeling of their strength.

They talked. Their Secretary wrote two letters. Both went to Mapleton next day, toward night. One was thick, its contents worn and dirty — some of it torn, all of it good. The other was thinner; it went to Holden Gates. They had waited a long time to send his letter; they expected to hear from both, so they were patient. They had been waiting for a generation.

They stopped at Pop's on going home. His friendship was always the same.

WASTE

X

THERE abides a town in the north of New York which long ago was founded by the first stout-hearted builders of the Empire, those toilers in wood and stone whose early handiwork extended far beyond their own days and their sons'; to even the coming of iron and steel, and now.

They set the town upon a sloping, fertile piece of uncleared land; for to the east and farther north was water, pure, cool and straight from outcropping hills; and on the other sides were forests and a sloping plain, and still another stream, more quiet, which edged them roundabout and at last placidly threw in its lot with the first. And because shadebearers of the name stood beside the stream, and on the plain were many of that name, they called their village *Mapleton*. The name endured and the place grew up and out, until one day twin lines of steel reached to the settlement that at the first lay only by the water whose bosom lapped the edges of the town. Prosperity edged in as its people settled on the land, till at last it made a city, small but virile.

Yet one day its growing slackened, almost stopped. Trains still rolled along the heavy rails but many went on through without so much as a pause, and industry and business sped overhead in the onrush of progress and quickening civilization which passed westward and beyond, still farther.

A bilious quiet fell upon the place and men, *young*

men, talked of the past: a town of yesterday with memories of one-time common fortune. Encompassing fringes of bare, abandoned farms, poor mud-splotched streets, paint chipping from the fronts of old, substantial houses which were fashioned in the styles of other times, were of the now. In pre-Revolutionary days the place had been a trading-post, a jerry-built metropolis in the forest-wrapped heights that hemmed it in between the valley of Great Moosehead river and the high, jet spurs of threatening hills.

Justly was Mapleton proud of the past; as happily did it wave careless fingers at a future.

Some prestige still attached by virtue of its designation as the county seat, but business was quiet and factories few. An industry was now and then attracted by the natural water-powers and reasonable accessibility the town afforded, yet few concessions and little real encouragement were ever given them to settle. Mostly, they didn't. Conservatism was the keynote. Further and greater factories meant labor, and they were not so far from Slab Fork as not to know what *labor* looked like. There was industry — and just enough — to leave prosperity in spots. No booms for them. Their quietness was safety.

Such travellers as had to pay infrequent visits to its marts in search of trade, which was not, were sometimes suspiciously complacent when they took their leave of "Dave's" and rode in his 'bus to the train for home, or anywhere else at least. The dust of the town was not the good, soft, city smoke. One filled the eyes, the other lined their noses, but the latter was the breath of hurry, industry and business; the other just descended and more quietly remained.

Dust there was, at all times save when it turned to splashing pools of mud and water; or when the idle

streets filled deep with piled-up drifts old-fashioned winters brought, these village streets so primly fringed with double rows of sugar maples. And maples caught the sun in summer before it reached the road, or hindered winter's drifts. Again, come spring or fall, they gave a pleasant savor of the season as their leaf-buds swelled to full or as the dead-ripe foliage first turned — then fell — in wealth of red and green and tawny gold which was the last good gift of the advancing cold. They furnished life, green life, to Mapleton. In this there was but little competition.

Broad were the streets and quiet, save when a body passed along the stone-flagged walks or rattling democrats and buggies jogged into town, dust-flecked or mud-encrusted from fine old packed-dirt roads untroubled still by cement or Mr. Macadam; passed into town and out again, occasionally most days, almost till gray of dawn in the course of a Saturday's night with its trading and holiday-making.

The town's own "square" — devised by usefulness rather than beauty — contained not too compactly a wooden banking structure which also might with just as great propriety have been a notions store, a lodging-house or bakery; the Post Office Building, until the last administration a leading grocery; a harness-maker's place and baker's shop; and less important miscellany. *In toto* Mapleton possessed three meat markets, twenty stores, one bearable hotel, a Civil War cannon and a soda parlor, two millineries, a single jail and a rotting bandstand. The stores were small, the hotel poor, the millineries strange. The meat markets were all, dirty to boot, and smelled to Heaven. But people, more or less, bought perforce at the stores and occasionally bided at "Dave's." The merchants and Dave were monopolists; they did accordingly.

The marts of Mapleton reminded dimly of the advertising spaces of a city's journal, and they might well have catered to the crassly curious or such as sought variety for its own sweet sake. They had benches before them, partly for groceries and mostly to sit. Wind-tattered, rain-splashed signs in front adjured him who knew to chaw "Corn Cracker"; old "Watch-Dog" galluses would see that his affairs were kept in place. Soft drinks were featured, as also patterns, dress shields, and shirts for lumberjacks; with cheap cigars which, stanchly built, were there to lend their crimson-banded, fly-flaked presence to the view.

Window space teetered 'twixt dishpans and dentrifice, grape juice and colic cure, shoe polish, indigenous plants. Most purveyed food. It was fresh while it held together, fruit if it did not spoil while you waited, for Mapleton was more than the span of a day's going from the oranges of Florida and the pineapples of Honolulu.

Most marts had the cheese-box rostra for dissecting men and things of state, albeit with dull knives. Wagner's "chorus of villagers" topped off the general *mise en scène*. Some stores offered clothing, often the suitings of yesteryear. It wasn't their fault; folks ought of got 'em sooner. You did not have to visit half-a-hundred shops to do your purchasing at Mapleton. What one man hadn't, the rest hadn't either. One sign said — bold and black — "Team and Auto Hiring; Fresh Meats and Ice for Sale; Funeral Director and Embalmer." Dwelt in the village the little brother of our good department store.

The place was slipping back. It had put down a foot on the new and radical; it had left it there — the foot — and it had gone to sleep. It happened so easily, without effort. Effort would have forged ahead. The

stores and business places spoke for the present; occasionally some building, the Court House or a home along State Street, made answer for the past. The roofs of all were coated with moss, the streets in spots with weeds.

This Court House, an old, age-tempered edifice: it set you hankering to settle down inside the quiet, stout-built offices a second and — maybe take a nap. It was no longer busy; it was restful. As the official center it held the Board of Education, County Treasurer and Surrogate and Clerk, the State's Attorney, and the Register of Wills, all stuffed inside as anyone could see who cared to con a painted strip within. It stood in a square of tall old maples, where its tower showed by day the four faces of a clock which looked out North, East, South, and West, and whose chime by night, answering for unseen faces, sometimes early, often late, reached throughout the town to say that all was well and bedtime come or gone. Beside the Court House, 'way back in a park-like place, the high school stood, the Free Academy of Mapleton as it was known. All through the year the vine-clung walls gave shelter and fair learnin' almost free to those who could not have a modish school.

But Mapleton had something of the modern, a village paper, several splendid factories and two dentists, again monopolists. These plants were not too large, but prospering and run on rather proper lines. They turned out cooperage, redoubtable vehicles, wooden novelties, underwear, some metal castings and old employees. Automobiles had a few years since scared their first country horses, and then there were railroads. They were two, and they were not much used. Few of the faithful ever fared forth. But if they did it was to come again one day and say, de-

lightly, "How very natural it all looks! I don't believe the dear old town has changed one bit."

Generally, they were right.

The yeomanry of Mapleton was chiefly all-American, if unenthusiastically. They were so American that the roots of their family trees were planted deep in the soil of the first Thirteen. Down to the old bedrock of undivided allegiance they reached, and there was never any other country for them, whatever faults they may have held as individuals or altogether.

This much, then, they may have missed by being unprogressive: the putrid claw of foreign infidelity had never touched nor weakened the fundamentals of their growth, or rather life. There was rarely a man and never a reason to speak for one land with the lips while the heart kept time for another.

True, a few *auslanders* had wandered in, but they apparently had been absorbed; they were prosperous, and leading, and Mapleton was as much of the one as was the Fork of the other, since the native-born lived in the valley, supported in part by the efforts of aliens who had passed on through to the woods. A few had been rich a long time; the rest poor the same time. It was a pot-pie of simmering emotions, things — friendliness, cruelty, kindness, sham; meddling, largeheartedness, bravery and cowardice, clean neighborliness, anonymous letters; good brewed with the bad, the worthless, and the moss-touched. Its crust was thin, and it had been cooked in a shallow dish, over a slow fire.

Folks loved municipal peace. Even elections did not disturb them much except there was Republican weather, which brought the land-tillers down from the hills to carry the vote that way. They of Slab Fork voted not, neither did they share in what was voted.

There had been infrequent talk of going up and making real Americans, showing them just how to take their part as citizenry in local statecraft. But this the more conservative had frowned upon. Why bring them down when they were so contented?

Occasionally old Holden Gates and partner, Hermann Vogel, had speech on this. For as law in a small town is seldom sufficient unto itself, and the field of limited litigation must be strengthened and combined with real estate, insurance, business enterprise, coal and wood and politics — but most with politics — so the legal union of Vogel and Gates had messed a bit therein. They were Prominent Citizens. Both were sufficiently careless, or ambitious, so that it often seemed that if the foreign ignorance of Slab Rock could only be “managed” with some Yankee shrewdness at the polls, voted as they were worked, *en masse*, unthinking, it would be a handsome factor.

Election days still passed as any other at the Fork. The foreman, occasionally some other, came down to Mapleton to vote. The doltish, unnaturalized rest worked; “Americanization” had passed on the other side anyhow. Also, voting took time; time was lumber; lumber money. *Viola tout!*

Vogel was a radical, for Mapleton. Gates perhaps was also, but knew his people. *He* owned a fine nose for smelling out political weather, had been already a State Senator, was Mayor as long as he had wanted, and now was waiting for something better to turn up.

Ordinarily, in Mapleton, things “turned up” slowly. A contented, meandering, comfortable folk were they, but most of all contented; sitting back in winter upon their hair-cloth best in sunny parlors, in light and warmth of slumbering wood-fires; more clement seasons of the year, and they were rocking easily on little

cramped-up "stoops." It was quite logically a goodly village, "The Queen of Hamlin County," and everyone was satisfied.

In the day of our fathers man needed man. James, trader, required Jerry, miller; and Thomas, householder, looked toward young Tim, the smith. They leaned on one another's shoulders, they took each other's arms. But even Mapleton could never be like that again. The *first* people were usually those who had always been so. They had made Mapleton. Why should they not keep it? The rest simply worked in their mills.

The Gates had always been there. They were therefore established, though they had not always been rich. It was thought that this would be forgotten. They were very successful now.

Gates the elder had seen his son go through a law school without much help from him. The good man had then died. He bequeathed a worthy name, there being no need of a will. There had, in fact, been liabilities. The younger, oddly, had met them before he married Emma Carter. Some time before the son had set on quite a different heritage when it should come his turn, for his had been a somewhat acrid pill. The poverty was mostly his; his wife supplied the bitterness. Meantime there was law practice. There were also lean years. Subsequently Gates branched out, became a lumberman. Shortly he was rich. He swallowed Slab Fork, and the anthill was prolific industry. It only needed stirring up.

About that time a man named Richard Crimmins disappeared, also his wife. He had been retired, a substantial man of family. He was a gentleman of quiet tastes, cultured rather than cultivated. Strangely, had a strong affection. It was his wife. She was a

beautiful creature, very young, but her vivacity was poorly foiled in Crimmins. He was not the sort who has a plaything. He only loved her.

His wife went out. Sometimes he did too, but very frequently she went alone, as he was generous. Occasionally she went with Mrs. Gates, and not so rarely Mr. Gates went too. They were a pleasant little group.

It happened one day that their town partway awoke, and saw that Gates was rich. A little while before the Crimmins left to pay a flying visit somewhere. They had not come back.

Yes, Gates was rich. He worked harder and lived faster, but he patronized the arts, endowed a club, gave rather noisily to charity, contributed to upkeep of a church. He replaced a coachman with a chauffeur, took on another hired man folks called a butler, and all allowed his was a practical success.

XI

A LIMOUSINE stopped by a smooth granite kerb. The driver sprang to the ground. Leaving his car, he ran up a short stone walk which ended in a flight of easy steps, and ascending these rang a bell which tinkled nicely in the house.

A maid in cap and apron answered, said, "In a minute, Jerry," and disappeared. She left the door ajar, for it was warmly spring, and the windows even had been raised to draw their share of the new, live air not long rid of its frost-rimed bite. The chauffeur withdrew to his car, where he waited with a hand on the door. It was a new car, with fine oak wheels and saffron trimmings; the driver shared, somewhat, its

newness. If grey coat and visored cap, and his black puttees, lacked a little of the shiny coloring, they none the less had been as closely cleaned. The man himself looked capable, and ever so courteous, as he glanced now proudly at his charge beside the street, then toward the house.

That house stood up erect and vain behind its little strip of short-clipped lawn. First leaves were peeping curiously out from ivy on the brick-built walls, and on the branching sugar maple which showed its head above a corner of the mansard roof. Fresh curtains fluttered at the windows, and the knocker and the bell-pull at the door were very brassy. The small square porch had newly blossomed out with armchairs and a hammock, and a man was busied hanging nicely painted boxes to the rail. That done, and he would raise a striped awning on the front. The storm-house down, her awning up, and people passing might therefore know that spring was come to Mapleton. The curtains on the porch of Mr. Gates meant, barometrically, that it was now correct to speak of "spring."

The house was not new, but the bricks were nicely weathered and the windows set in curving tops, and inside shutters folded back behind the newer shades. The house was stiff, yes, formal, yet at the least it wore a rather settled, deprecating look, as if its own façade peered down a trifle satisfiedly upon each other houses as had come there since. The House of Gates was *thoroughly established*. It looked very refined.

The half-shut door was fully opened, and a little girl of six or seven years appeared. Composedly she descended the steps, smiled a nice "Good-morning" to the driver, and with a pretty air received some pads and school-books of the maid who followed.

At an upper window a lady appeared, waved, called

"Good-bye, Barbara," and went away again. She was not fully prepared for her day. The little girl herself promptly smiled and waved her hand, then settled back against the cushions as the maid turned toward the house. The chauffeur handed her a robe, not that the morning was cold but it was precisely what he had been taught. He closed the door, cranked his machine, and they started.

It was a wonderful day, and Barbara called to open the windows of the car, for she was young as the spring. The streets were shot with sunlight, the skies held only little puffs of cloud, and the mating cries of the first-come birds started a song in her own small throat, she probably could not have told you why. Remembering just in time, she suppressed the little tune, and sat well back to the enjoyment of the day.

The little maid was not large for six, though pretty and very well-formed. The child gave promise of a maiden who might well be charming, and perhaps still more. She was a dainty mite. The lashes and eyes were softly dark, as was the hair that in a pair of ribbon-ended bows hung down behind. Her hat that morning was large and *floppy*. It had daisies on it, and the little gown was very neat and trim. Its close-wove wool was nice and it looked expensive. So the little girl was pleased and satisfied.

Sunshine, so warm and gold you would have sworn it never saw a cloud, stole in the windows of the car; the light breeze stirred with its motion promised her vacation and longer rides and summer trips, and maybe — and maybe — a walk with old Hattie that night. Then why not smile and wave to tiny schoolmate-friends she saw at corners now and then? One child she sometimes met, a thin-faced thing who studied at "the public," was hurrying in that direction now, but

not so very fast, since one of the little feet and legs was lame; and probably could never grow just like the other. For a moment Barbara considered stopping, and only just in time recalled her mother.

While the car spun along on its way to school, the birds sang on the newly-leaving trees. Behind, the little lame girl stubbed along.

Miss Brownscombe's school, where Barbara was bound, stood at one end of Main Street. The parents of several little Barbaras sent their daughters thence to imbibe much not taught in public schools; and miss more that could not be learned anywhere else. The lucky students at Miss Brownscombe's, young as they might be, were treated to a finishing process which usually endured, so that her product stood out among the ordinary throng. The product did not object; and the ultimate consumer was apparently content.

The car reached Miss Brownscombe's, its door automatically opened, and Barbara ran in. Miss Brownscombe met her in the hall, saw to her hat and coat, and the little girl went on to the school-room in a front wing of the house. It was not quite nine o'clock, so that pupils were gathered in knots of two or three by size or age, or family, and were talking divers things, like grown-ups. Some were relatively old, at least of the high school age, though there were others quite as young as Barbara.

"Oh, my dear," said one, as the latter joined them at the door, "what a horribly smart gown you have on. Where in the world did you get it. I *never* have anything to wear like that."

The children were all progressive.

"Do you *really* like it? Mother got it in New York last week."

"Well, it certainly is the sweetest thing! Mamma

has promised to take me there in June, and I am *wild* to go."

"What are you going to wear for Freddie Hunter's party, Barbara?" spoke up another.

"I don't know. My new white one, I suppose," answered the one addressed. "What are you?"

"Young ladies, young ladies," said Miss Browncombe in a nicely ice-cooled manner, just coming in, "please take your places for the morning's classes."

Exercises finished with a prayer through which a few were stooped devoutly forward on their foreheads. This over all vouchsafed a loud "Amen!" one part thankfulness, three of relief.

Work went as usual. In all good time the slow black hands of the schoolroom clock said twelve, and here and there about the town a whistle sounded. An Angelus was rung, and the noise of horns and clutching brakes outside was further proof that they might leave for lunch. So out they piled. The door of the shiny limousine opened again to Barbara, and she got in, but this time not alone. Dorothe Turner lived in a large brown house next door to hers. It was permissible to ride with Dorothe.

The little girls sat back dangling their feet, and rode laughing up the Main Street of the town, past Mill Road, just now vomiting forth the operatives of a pair of factories farther down there by the stream; by a few of the town's few stores; turning up State Street to the residential section where their set lived and moved and had a being. Dorothe and Barbara entered each her home, where the latter was promptly set upon and seized, washed, combed and brushed by the maid, then sent below. Steven was just announcing "Luncheon served."

Mrs Gates went in with Barbara, and her father

entered from the street. He came in briskly, whistling, and sat down with them.

"Well, what news today, Holden?" Mrs. Gates inquired very genially when eating had progressed enough to warrant talk.

"Very little, my dear. Oh, yes — now I think of it, another of the men was killed up at the Fork yesterday. He left a wife, just been married a day or two, but the Company's all right. He was drunk when it happened."

So Barbara's Mother said, "My, how fortunate!"

And shortly after, "Barbara, dear, run up and have your gown changed. You should start back for school, and you *do* look so untidy!"

XII

EVENING had laid its pall of dusk across the homes and streets of Mapleton. Factory whistles blew; workers were stumbling home with empty dinner pails and stomachs; the clock atop the Court House dinned out the toilers' reprieve of six; and here and there bright lights flashed up inside the brick-front residences on State Street.

Small, futile lamps were flickering on corners, their rays surrendering to darkness in the maze of maple trees and leaves that hemmed them in. Lighting in Mapleton was not a civic science. It mainly emphasized dark spots, and never got much farther than the lamp-posts.

Fatigue was daubed upon men's faces, with dirt and grease on clothes. In paint or varnish discernment read which worked on furniture down by the river; or by the caking grime, beside which ordinary blackness

paled, picked those who forged large water-wheels for small, reluctant dollars inside a hard-by foundry. Girls were there, too, poor slips with cringing backs and burning feet and likely tired heads, who stood beside a labyrinth of circling spools and spindles for weary years of days. Of course, they were girls from the mill. None of them were tired; they were numb.

Work crowded old flag walks, but in the street that lay between *Life* flowed along by motor. The cushion was soft, so the road was smooth. Ladies talked and children laughed, or sang. Their cries lay cheerily upon the ears of those who stumbled. There is so much for which to live when man stands waiting with a check-book and your maid will do the rest, though these have not eaten either.

And here is one in misery — soft gown, rich fur, and fine-weave wrap; plunged deep in it. For the new pink silk, it has not come.

Exclusiveness is out. Scattered as they emerge from different homes, the motors by degrees converge until in single file they sweep along and up a pebbled drive, to stop inside the *porte cochere* of White Hall, the old home, excellent and formal, of the Thomas Watson Hunters.

Colonel Hunter was a gentleman by birth and a man by inclination. As a "Colonel" he was war-made. As all three he was authentic. His wife was a very good woman. They were prominent and did not trouble to be snobbish. *Creme de la creme*, of the best, the Colonel Hunters were apt occasionally to offer hospitality to Mapleton. Mapleton gorged. You met at Colonel Hunter's, now and then, poor friends of the Gates and Carpenters and Twilbys. The Hunters were so well established they frequently practiced democracy, and really meant it.

"Colonel Thomas," strangers said, was certainly "a fine old man," as old and near gone as his type. He was a lawyer, and a good one; he was honest, yet successful. He had occupied at times some fairly high-up offices, but he enjoyed the good-will of those who hadn't.

Years ago the Hunters had a daughter, a girl who made them live again. A lovely child became a woman who was exquisite. Then she had died, perhaps ten years ago. It is not easy to reckon time in a small town. But the Hand that had taken returned them a son, a boy much younger, Frederick Cushman. At present he was Fred, and Mrs. Hunter had prepared a little party for him. Her trifling gatherings were generally affairs of no mean size. Many of Freddie's age were bade, and to the end there might be some amusement for herself she asked their mothers with them.

The children were ready at four o'clock, not so their mothers. It was a little after six that Gates' machine had made its way down State, up Main, and finally found itself behind a row of others fronting Hunters'. The Gates were far to the rear, for goodwife Gates was informed.

They had not very long to wait, and gradually they worked inside and were assisted from their car. Though it had room for six or seven, just Mrs. Gates and Barbara were in it. They noticed going in that some had come afoot.

Inside was Mrs. Hunter, dispensing welcomes and a smile according to the guests. She had a pleasant little laugh for Mrs. Gates and Barbara, "*So glad to see you, dear, and little Barbara . . .*"; then beams fell somewhat less intensely on succeeding ones, still further paled at Mesdames Schwab and Watts, who were considered rather earthy.

Mrs. Schwab and Mrs. Watts were sisters. They were also personalities, the former being Mrs. D. F. Schwab, whose husband was editor and owner of Mapleton's *Town Crier*, and, don't forget, a joint owner of "the cheapest store in town." The sheet was sometimes termed affectionately the "Augur" — but figure it yourself. Mrs. Schwab's husband was also the managing and chief contributing editors, described men's meetings, knew how to set type, and read proof when they were busy. He was *it*. But being a jack-of-trades the proof of the paper was not in his reading, so he usually confined himself to other duties, abandoning the proof to care of itself or to that of William Smith, the boy, which was very much the same.

The Madame Editor wrote "society" when present. Even now, as Mrs. Watts allowed, you saw her gazing fixedly at someone's *crepe de chine*, and visioned in the *Crier* of next Wednesday that the house was tastefully fixed up with roses, trailing autumn leaves, and that the whilom well-known matron, Mrs. Rumble-Bumble, had been among the guests from out of town, quite tastefully got up in rich black taffeta or old point lace.

Mrs. Schwab and sister approached the hostess' throne. Mrs. S. was visiting, likewise the mate of T. Ephraim Brodribb Watts. Folks sometimes shortened it to Mrs. "Tattler" Watts, quite in the homely fashion of the place. As they reached Mrs. Hunter they started to settle. Mrs. Hunter said, "How do you do? Why, how *do* you do? Go right into the room at the end of the hall. You will find the others there." Mrs. Hunter was efficient, charmingly.

There were first polite preliminaries. Soon they all got down to gossip, then the nice refreshments. Persons chattered of the heaps of poverty there were that

fall, and had some more ice cream; and dwelt on all the woolen things (in barrel) the church had sent only the week before to certain of the Bengalese, in warmest India. Please recollect that in our little aristocracy we have not got before us either Paris or Vienna, neither New York. Provincials are not magnificoes who hail from Pennsylvania Avenue — Mount Vernon Place — Fifth Avenue or Rittenhouse. They are neither bad, nor very interesting. Indeed they may but do their best; sometimes they just don't comprehend, themselves, what they have square before them.

Nearly everyone was there, and Mrs. Bodeheaver was talking forcefully with Mrs. Lucy Sparks about the theatre, Mrs. Sparks being advanced and Mrs. Bodeheaver conservative. Poor Mrs. Sparks wasn't even *attractively* homely, but she was very vigorous. She owned a weakness for modern breakfast foods and Harrold Chalmers-Sobb, modern mushmaker. She had even been suspected of being "suffrage." You could see, now, that Mrs. Bodeheaver did not approve of the theatre — but they all agreed that it was excellent weather for the time of the year, of course; and one lady said her husband had just returned from a hunting trip up near the Moosehead's source. He said the woods were really charming, and that as he passed through the Fork he had encountered one of the strangest funeral processions he had ever been fortunate enough to meet, don't you know. It was just a man and a woman, with two small boys and a minister. Oh, yes, there was a pine box on a wagon, but the mourners walked. He told her they must have been quite poor.

Mrs. Gates was telling of the opera she expected to visit in the Metropolis next week, and anyway, she really did not recall much of the Fork. Yes, she had been there once, but it was terribly dirty. It was

nicer to think of *it* as motors or a little jaunt abroad; which was perfectly sensible in the fact, since the Fork had seldom varied from an annual return of thirty-five per cent in twenty years. When it had, it was higher. Judicious timber investing at the traditional dollar-per-acre did sometimes grow an awfully pleasant *net*.

Children were merry, and the rest kept comfortable. They made a pretty picture. There were tall ladies with short hats, short women with tall hats, and stout persons with no hats. All were happy in themselves or pitying some neighbor. The children looked very attractive, and Barbara danced several times with Master Hunter. Everyone had a delightful time, and it was really too bad they had to go, "but, you know how it is, husband home, baby to kiss good night, and these children. . . ."

The ladies began to say good-by. In time the last motor had chugged down the drive and Mesdames Watts and Schwab were trudging chattily from out. As Mrs. Watts exclaimed, it was "a memory!"

Houses on State Street showed their lights, while in the little streets men slept. Up in Slab Fork they may have stirred uneasily, for night was partly gone; then fell to dreaming of another day.

XIII

THE Very Reverend Isaac Sykes was a fetish to his flock. However much the members of his fold were wont to differ on the Canticles, they were agreed on that. He was a harmlessly good man, and preached as

you liked it; saying, to an unpleased few, "And what the mission of the church if not to bring great comfort to the flock?" Which was unanswerable, and saved the Rev. Isaac a vast deal of trouble.

There was a cold morning in the white months when for one day the clouds lifted, the sun smiled brightly if not warmly, and the snow came not. The maple rows wore icy frosting, and from their myriad points shot out a million spears of light to give a welcome to the morning and to a few poor snow-birds which came and for a moment perched there. There had been snow and hail, and rain and freezing on the night before, but the morning was clear and you imagined, if you thought of it at all, that up in the great woods North it was cold. Arch Baker and his old bay team had come out early and run their side-wind plow first up, then down, the coated walks of State Street, next changed to Main, and cleared the piled-up drifts from Col. Hunter's to the church. The poorer streets they saw to after, though dwellers rose and went out earlier.

There were a number of churches, and none of them could pay expenses. A few, like Reverend Sykes', had wealthy members. They made out. They grouped together with a nice precision like New England. The churches were not ambitious, but structures were greater than congregations. Once there had been a single strong, fine church; fell a day when there was too much Creed for one, not long enough prayers for another, and when old Deacon Stinson had had the leading seat for mercy knows how much too long; which netted many little churches standing in a row. The Very Reverend Isaac saved souls of the better class.

The wooden plow had gone and snow now slanted up from the walk to the banks on either side, with a foot-way in the center eighteen inches wide and not more.

than half as deep in partly trampled snow, so that those for whom the day was not too cold, the hour too early, or the sun too bright had picked their way along to church.

Under the agued touch of Zekiah Bailey, who taught weekdays and pedalled Sunday, the uncertain notes of the organ filled to a great and partly tuneful fulness the high-gabled sanctuary of the First Church, falling dully upon the ears of the Rev. Sykes as he hugged himself in his pulpit. The head was bowed, in thought or else because the meal his wife Phoenicia had lately fixed had turned to lead. Stained-glass sunlight trickled in, and a transient ray slanted across the church to fall immediately upon the high bald head of Ezra Bodeheaver, who sat with Mrs. Bodheaver well up in the seats of the mighty. As Ezra himself said, "Religion is what you make it. It is mighty, and must avail." Ezra was packed with good things, and if a word escaped him he at once employed another vocable which sounded like one.

The Gates were prominent in church, that is, they filled front seats for which he paid spot cash. He was "a godly man," as Mr. Sykes had sometimes thought aloud; they were *all* godly men and women. No doubt Reverend Sykes implied that were every one as godly as this eminent pew-holder he might very well devour more salary, with less vegetable and culinary free-wills. He had tastes himself.

Mrs. Gates always rustled in first, Barbara followed starchily, and Mr. Gates heavily closed the pew, frock-coated, terrible and formal for the day. Mr. Gates dressed well. So did the other Gates, and no one had a better right. It was even so this morning. Barbara was very pretty as she sat between them looking very rightly straight ahead to where, among the little gusts

of air which eddied through the church, a multitude of tiny candles flamed and flickered beside the one great taper which burnt with dignity and steady fire beside the pulpit.

The organ ceased from troubling, Mr. Sykes pulled down his vest. Having done so, he b-r-r-d twice or thrice impressively, arose, and read a hymn. It was a long hymn, and he read all of it. "We will sing," he amended, "the first two and the last three verses." Zekiah, who high up behind them in his loft had cut in once upon the Reverend Isaac's reading with a little tremulo, now pulled his stops, the first soprano lost her music but rediscovered it again, and the House of Worship sounded with the clamour of their singing.

Much of the very fair-sized congregation sang, loud or faintly with their consciences or sense of hearing. Mr. Gates was strictly bass, Mrs. Gates trebled, and Barbara piped. The choir was composed of volunteers. They had made no reservations, and they did all they could. Their efforts were abetted stoutly by Mr. Bodeheaver, whose singing was a factor. Once upon a day a bad boy, long abandoned by our good, had suddenly repented and occupied a seat up front for near a month. He had only come to learn to sing like Mr. Bodeheaver. Then he relapsed.

After the hymn of praise they sat upon hard seats or knelt on padded stools and throbbing foreheads while Rev. Isaac prayed. His was no half-hearted praying. He prayed long, and strong, and his repertoire covered the gamut of total human emotion. He always included abject thanks for "giving us everything, better than we can ask or even think."

His prayers were thorough, and they were amply reinforced by the sermon which descended heavily upon his auditors soon afterward. He did not use the ser-

monette, God being too busy for trifles. Having cast out his text, something on brotherly love since Christmas was nearing, he began to mull over the words, half to himself, before starting to ravel up the thread of his discourse and assail the pleasant weaknesses of man. He did so well, and to the end that nearly everyone among them offered praise unasked that he was not as were most others. Becoming dignifiedly enthusiastic, he plied the tale of the Good Samaritan and of the great majority whom public opinion even then encouraged to pass on the other side. He talked as it was *then*; he brought it down to *now*. The congregation felt a slight uneasy itching — they need not have — until he told of how, long years before, he, unknown, unknowing, had come to them a stranger, to minister unto their needs. And they had taken him in, into their homes, their hearts, their lives.

“ ‘As ye have done it unto the least of these. . . .’ ” And people, *his* people, smiled, exhaled “Lord love us all,” and knew that they were good.

This being done nothing more remained to be said, as the sermon had previously been dispensed in the first, second, third and fourth parts. After which the collection was taken, and there came a spontaneous solo while the older and graver in their midst passed up and down the aisles, and Mr. Bodeheaver made change from the plate. He never made a mistake, that is, he never in haste gave more than intended. Another hymn, and the blessing of Sykes fell over them.

Zekiah produced a march. Together they arose and passed out. The minister reserved a handshake and good-morning for each, to which were added sweet words of their own anent his sermon. Mrs. Gates liked it particularly. She as much as said so.

"It almost took you out of yourself, you know; made you think of those who are not so fortunate."

Mr. Gates lent smiling confirmation, and the minister agreed to come to them for dinner, soon. Mrs. Sykes did not go out much. Without, all chatted for a moment with the ones they knew, friends met and neighbors gossiped, and some strangers who were there fetched an escape quite easily.

Mrs. Gates told Barbara to stay for Sunday School, which the poor child didn't fancy. Her class was taught by Mrs. Rev. Sykes, who told them horror tales of foreign missionaries who were come upon, perhaps at church, and buried neck-deep in the burning sands. And left there, too, unless they gave their word as Christians to be heathen. Which foolishly they didn't, but ended by having their heads sanded up too. Her instruction was effective, with a moral. Barbara used to have cold chills.

Mr. and Mrs. Gates left and motored to the Post Office, well and easy in body and soul. His was the vista of a fresh successful "deal," she saw a picture of herself — a hat just new, a suit that was not old — and both were greatly cheered and happy. For a moment was come contentment. They could not think of anything additional that they wanted.

In the mail was news from Larrabee. He wrote that it was *cold* up at the Fork, and with a bit of suffering among the people. Himself hard, he recommended Gates do something: give them a little added pay, or have some food and clothing sent.

Which, upon reading, Mr. Gates showed to his wife and she said,

"I don't believe, Holden dear, it's really half as bad, do you? They always do exaggerate so terribly. I can't *imagine* anything like that myself."

With a dead but popular Queen of France she might have added, "Since they have no bread, why *don't* they eat cake?"

Instead Emma Gates glanced hopelessly in the direction of the heavy double panes closing a splendid oriel, which caught the little chilly gusts that whistled comfortably outside. A few starry flakes fell on the thick plate-glass, mirrored their crystals for an instant, then thawed away. It is good to have a home.

Gates waved his hand good-humoredly.

"Don't bother, it isn't. Suppose it were, my dear? Old winter's all right! Why, I've seen men work just for the sake of keeping warm."

Barbara came home. They called to Steven to restock the grate, an open blaze looked so cheerful, and all sat down to a good chicken dinner — with biscuit.

XIV

EVERYONE says and no man denies that the proof of the gardener sprouts in his garden, the test of the doctor lies in his pill. Now conceive the hand-picked charges of Miss Brownscombe emerging from their desks and blackboards armed with Greek enough to build a fire or cook an omelet. Indeed, you learned to eat your omelet, not to cook it. In better channels the diploma of Miss Brownscombe was the blue ribbon of a horse show.

Barbara Gates spent with that teacher eight out of thirteen years. The little girl who went to school by limousine became a larger girl who went to school in a new limousine. Her figure lengthened and filled. Her face took on a longer shape, then turned to oval. She

was enough grown up at thirteen years so that she was no longer very awkward as a child. Her little-girl prettiness had not left; it promised something yet prettier. Her cheeks were very round and red, her eyes were deep and dusky, and two long braids of hair, dark brown and looking very soft, fell down her back together. The face was sweet, but had a shadow of the petulance which always was a part of Mrs. Gates.

Mrs. Gates, the girl, had once been poor, sincerely sweet, and simply happy. Mrs. Gates, the woman, was wealthy, disagreeable (at home), and chronically unhappy. One fancied she had bit too well of the apple of life, expecting only sweet; and it had turned out sour.

Mrs. Gates' body had fattened with ample years. She reckoned her days by engagements, and rested heavily on maids and soda mints. Her soul, or something, had atrophied, was working badly. Her mind had left deep wells of girlhood and lay upon a shoal of thin meanderings. Neither head nor heart was guide. When Mrs. Hunter coughed, she sneezed. *Poverty?* She loathed it, so helpless, horrible, a thing that lay against low ground.

Emma Gates possessed a single keen, fine love. It was herself. She had perhaps one real, kind liking. That was Barbara. Her husband had been something, originally. She understood him. He might have been a worthy, ordinary man had not Mrs. G. been jealous. Ambitions outstripped extravagance, but they perforce encouraged his resourcefulness. Emma, in brief, supplied the bitter leaven of their life, the Josephine of our Napoleon.

Before they were married Gates had believed some men born clever, and that a few women became so, but very few. His exception, or sweetheart — save the

term — could have lived on fifteen dollars a week, well. Fifty thousand could not answer for his *wife*. He was forever set to scratching for some more. All-in-all Gates succeeded, and his wife preceded. Sometimes she pushed, others she clawed. Gates had been born to be well-off, and Gates' wife loved him for it. Besides, had he not, she would have been very unhappy. Some folks claimed they were well above *par*. We shall not dub them typical because they are real.

The wife could be generous. Such as she had to spare she gladly showered on Barbara. The parent vine was strong, and this should be a single precious graft. Barbara after all did rather well. She was yet chiefly child. She feared her father and studied her mother, but she *loved* the old nurse who had so cheerfully put up with her when she was small, and squally, and spilled her food and wiped her spoon on plain old Hattie's sleeve, and nearly died of croup.

Now that Barbara was so advanced, Mrs. Gates was for Hattie's going out forthwith, but the little girl begged not, and Mr. Gates said, "No, let her have her way." So poor ancient Hattie lingered on in place of a "foreign companion." No one else had the latter, though, which made it very desirable. Hattie was so funny, plain, old-fashioned. The poor old thing was *real*. But Hattie had to leave, with Barbara, that fall. Barbara would go to school, and Hattie — she would depart. Better so, for her little girl was all she understood, and loved, in the excellent home of Gates.

Spring had popped in one day, and found that Barbara was fourteen. It was time to graduate. Many were in attendance. There was a multitude of parents with innumerable friends, and as if that were not enough the Rev. Sykes.

There was also Miss Brownscombe; and the Rev.

Sykes had made a prayer. Their amen was honest, because he had done. That, though, had been only a beginning, and there had come fine arts and nice sciences. One of the oldest, Hermione Smith, gave them a reading upon "The Bishop's Candlesticks." Bernadette Dennis, who played so well for thirteen, had rendered something of "Samson and Delilah," no one was really sure what part. Miss Brownscombe herself, *in a few well-chosen words*, had given them a "short appreciative talk," to borrow from the *Crier*. And she called them, one-and-all, *the very best classes* of her school, which was a counterpart of each year's graduation.

Afterward there were diplomas, good times and congratulations no end, with tea; and Mrs. Editor Schwab, who had got in officially, used cream and lemon both while babbling confidentially to Mr. Sykes upon some higher types of education. Barbara was pleasantly excited, and her mother quite as proud of daughter as of new silk dress containing same. That latter the best modiste of Mapleton, good Mme. Flaherty, had made.

Gates was at home for dinner. He never refused his daughter, and had kissed her to show *his* pleasure. People called Gates "cold"; they didn't know him. After dinner the Gates talked for awhile to each other. Mr. Gates went out when able. Tonight he felt a cold, and Mrs. Gates asked Barbara to play, for the child had been afforded music and gained the usual stage. But Barbara was tired, and when the old nurse passed through the drawing-room, following her dinner, Barbara had run and slipped a hand in Hattie's. She waved a kiss to the others, and they went upstairs together.

Years before this Hattie had formed the evil precedent of story-telling. Rare bed-times without a

story meant the woman was away. She told good stories evidently, for the first was followed by many. A thread of half-similitude ran in the warp and woof, but it did not worry the child.

Hattie's creations were many-named. There was "The Enchanting Cat," "The Homely Princess," "The Cross Young Man," "The Wretched Rabbit," "The House that Never Grew Up," and "The Rich Little Boy with a Hole in His Pocket." Hattie said they were "all true fairy stories," and who indeed ever heard of a tale beginning "Now once upon a time . . ." that there wasn't a tame, good fairy or a hunch-backed, crabbèd old elf concealed somewhere about? And everyone knows how very, very real *they* are.

Barbara had not grown up, though done with Miss Brownscombe and nearly with braids. Another year would see her in another place than Mapleton, no Hattie, and no . . .

"Hattie, tell me the story of 'The Rich Little Boy with a Hole in His Pocket.' Please!"

"My! child, you've got too old for my poor stories. You've heard old Hattie tell her fairy tales a million-hundred times. And *I* don't think she tells them very well now, either. You don't want stories tonight."

"I do, I do. Please, please! Hattie, tell me the story of 'The Rich Little Boy.'"

The first "please" set the old heart caving in; the second completed her confusion. Victory was complete, and Hattie made shift to capitulate.

"Well, child, if you must. . . .

"Now once upon a time, oh, a long time ago, there was a very poor young man."

"How poor, Hattie?"

"Now, Barbara, don't interrupt or I'll never get it told. There was a *very* poor young man, so poor that

he had *nothing* in the world, nothing in the whole, whole world but his own round, honest face, a heart that was happy when the birds sang, and two large eyes that saw sunshine, and the trees wave in the wind."

"Didn't he have anything else, at all?"

"Well, he did have a Mother and a Father, yes, and a little Brother, too, but they were even poorer than the poor young man. His Father's heart was very cold and tired, and his Mother's eyes were closed so that *she* couldn't see the sunshine and the trees; and his little Brother's face was thin and pale; he had no rosy cheeks."

"Why was it pale, Hattie?"

"You know well enough why it was, child, you've heard it so many times."

"Yes, but I want to know now."

"Well, then, if you must have it, the little one's face was thin and pale, because, no matter how hard the Father worked, he *could not* get enough to give them all the food and clothes and wood they had to have to keep them well and warm.

"But the poor young boy grew tall and strong, for he worked, and he walked in the woods and the fields. The work made his heart beat fast, and the sun and the wind left color in his cheeks; while the fresh, cool air brought a song to his lips, and sometimes made him glad.

"Now when he was just fifteen he went away."

"Away from *all* his people?"

"Yes, far away, to the Land of Promise, for his Father grew weak and old, and his Mother fell ill and was blind, and the little Brother had no one at all to give him what a dear little boy should have.

"The poor young man was a long time gone, so

long indeed that his Mother and Father and weak little Brother thought surely he'd forgotten them, and they were very sad. He was getting that way himself, for the Land of Promise was a far way off, and his legs couldn't carry him half as fast as he really wanted to go.

"But one day he saw It when he 'woke, and it was very beautiful. The trees bore golden fruit, there was also a river of silver; and the dew on the flowers was pearls and diamonds. He took one of the apples, and a little of the running silver, and picked some of the shiny jewels from the buttercups and daisies. He didn't want to take too many, for he thought there might be other little boys like him. He didn't know that every morning left new diamonds on the grasses and the flowers, and there were always apples, while the river never, never lost its silver.

"He didn't want to take too many, and besides he only had one pocket in his coat. He filled it, oh! so carefully, then took one last long look, so that he would not forget this wonder-place. The very next morning, very bright and ever so early, he was off and away — to the Land of Real. He went quickly, even quicker than he'd come, for he was going home!

"It was still a day's journey away when one night he fell down to rest, tired, and lonely, and lame. As he took off his coat to make a pillow for his head, he found . . ."

"Yes, Hattie, what did he find?"

"He found that his pocket was *empty*!"

"Oh, *did* he?"

"Yes, it was empty, and in place of the golden apple, his lovely silver, and all the jewelled dew he found a hole — only a small, mean hole.

"The night was dark, and he lay very still on the

ground. The poor lad, he cried. He cried so hard he cried himself to sleep.

"But in his sleep a hand touched his, and a sweet voice said to him,

" 'Little boy, why in the world are you crying?'

"And he said, though he couldn't see a thing and it seemed as if he still slept on, 'I cry because I've lost my gold.'

"The sweet voice said, again,

" 'Why, how can you be so selfish? You are very young, and strong. Some time you can get some more. Were you crying just for that?'

"But the little boy said, 'No.' He cried to think of his poor old Mother and tired Father, and the very little boy at home. And then he saw the Fairy's face close down to his, sweet and happy it was, and very beautiful.

"She kissed him, stretched out a starry wand, and he woke up to find that it was day. His tears were dry, and in his coat he felt his apple and the jewels, all the silver, too, and the little mean hole was gone.

"That night he reached his home, after all. The Father left his work, and smiled; the little Brother's face grew rosy once again; and when his Mother cried, the tears of happiness and joy ran out her eyes and opened them, and she could see.

"So the Poor Little Boy was a Rich Young Man. He never left home any more, and all of them were happy, ever after.

"*Then* what did the young man do?"

"I don't know, child; do go to sleep."

"I wish I knew. *I'd* like to be a good fairy like that; now wouldn't you, Hattie?"

Old Hattie devoured the little crumpled figure in the big soft bed, and lost an honest tear.

Downstairs, Mr. Gates had just subdued his wife at pinochle, and was having an excellent temper. Mrs. Gates called a maid, and ordered a bit of lunch. Hattie prepared it. The other servants sat around to have a word on Gates, and Mrs. Gates. While she worked, Hattie defended them. When she had finished, the maid served and was thanked.

The sherry was good, the plush-filled chair was comfortable, Gates' world was fair. He promised to look at a brand-new car in the morning, and his wife kissed him.

XV

Some nights thereafter a little part of Mapleton was at its Founders' Club. Yes, Mapleton possessed a city club, "Just large enough, you know." They were dining. Later they would dance, a party being given by the Turners. Among the diners, later on the dancers, were the Gates and Barbara. The T. Watson Hunters sat at dinner with them, Fred included. Fred and Barbara were excellent friends. They "went together." The boy was sixteen, beginning to be a deal of a man, so that girls of his age sometimes criticized and talked about him and parents looked approvingly upon his first long pants.

Mapleton was unaccustomed to surprises. Accordingly, its privileged and curious were always mildly intrigued to see a Hunter dining with a Gates. Despite ingrained disparities, Mrs. Hunter and Mrs. Gates were not bad friends, but their husbands had never been close. Perhaps it was for the children, this evening.

No one had ever threatened the Colonel with being progressive. He was very polite, but insisted none the less on being and acting conservative. Yet he was

wholesomely concerned with broad-gauge topics of the day. His was a birthright from the old ideal, to serve. Gates never said so, but you rather fancied he expected service.

The dinner, though, was very pleasant, and the ladies dwelt at length upon some splendid people they had met, from Malvern, via a recent Bridge. That recalled the party old Mrs. Brown was giving, Tuesday of next week. Colonel Hunter mentioned a trifling national trouble they were having, and wished his land with one great mind.

"Confound it, sir, the needs of the times demand we take some thought of other things than money-grubbing. We have a country rich in great resources, populous with people, noble in its possibilities.

'In Europe, sir . . .'

While Barbara and Fred were chatting volubly enough, and Mr. Watts came by and told a well-loved story. He was apprehended by Mrs. Watts, who tried to execute a flanking movement on them all. But her attack was sadly confounded through their immediate departure for coffee on the porch.

The sun was slipping down. Only its rosiness lingered, to hang for just a moment on the town. It touched the churches' tops with gold and richly shadowed trees. It even made a few black factory-stacks, far-off, a little cheerful, until it sank and left a haze of broken outlines tree-etched along the sky. The town was gone, yet a carriage rattled by in the dust and the stones of the streets, a dog yelped in his box, and a baby cried behind some far-off darkened window. Talk harkened long enough to give mellifluent small sounds of the night a little turn; a bird sang as it found its nest, a cricket chirped down on the lawn, a lonely frog called somewhere from his pool down by the

river. Fireflies rose from the grass, enough it seemed to set the earth afire; winds came warmly scented from green fields and sprouting crops, fresh woods, ripening fruit, and growing corn. And it held the odors of nearer at hand, from the roses before the Club. The maples swung a little in the soft night wind, and tugged hard at their roots.

Within the Club a fiddle string was tightened into tune, the key of the piano spoke, and then an orchestra began. Barbara and Fred prepared to leave the porch. Fred was saying "May I have the honor of this number?" for boy, like father, was enough old-fashioned to be fair-mannered. They lost no time in getting to the floor, but some was lost in getting around it. The ballroom's size was usually sufficient, for attendance was restricted to the Club except on party nights. At such times congestion was great. Feet suffered, gowns frayed.

Through the wide doors of the hall guests still trailed in, men in black, children in white, women in gauze and shiny clap-trap, all talking, all merry, all fretting to enter into the joys of the night. Into the Club, up to the cloak room, down to the ballroom, past the receiving Turners they went. Then portly dames and dashing dandies were out upon the floor. And everywhere was motion, noise, and light. They circled the ballroom and stopped at the punch, finished the dancing and walked to the porch. The merry Andrews of the town warmed to their work, and puffy parties strove to hold their own. There were gray-haired men; young, pretty girls; men who were not so gray, and boys; ladies who were not so young, but dancing. These kept on moving and their husbands swore, but softly.

After the first or obligatory number, the latter all

danced from choice. While sons of chivalry endured mothers of fair daughters, fathers danced with the daughters themselves. The "Paul Jones" cared for all quite well, except that time when Ed. Schwab's partner, Filcher, became the portion of sour old Mrs. Chambers. This worthy woman, large of self, was short of temper. She likewise favored her own feet.

S. Filcher, you recollect, saw things much better near at hand. He was also new to dancing, and owned a torpid tendency toward mussing collars. Indeed, the good man's hands had once or twice left faint, dank spots upon a partner's back. He danced because Mrs. Filcher danced; her relatives, who lived with Mrs. Filcher, also danced. Which was excellent, except that many reaped where she had sown. Poor Sammy always counted steps, trying to watch his feet. When reading, a book or a paper was usually stopped at his nose. His feet being sixty-five inches below, he peered toward them intensely. This caused a certain in-erectness when in motion. Not being able to raise the feet above a foot or two, he bent his head to see them. While stooping he lost the crowd, and in counting lost track of all else.

It worked to the end that Mrs. Chambers' feet were often counted out, and Mrs. Chambers' back came often in hard contact with other frames and shoulders. Though not a heavy man, he made his presence felt. Mrs. Chambers quickly groped for ways and means. Facial expressions brought no reactions; for ever were his eyes on his feet. She wished him off among the down-and-outs, the wall-flowers, but mercifully the whistle blew. Mrs. Chambers drew a better partner and a breath, Mr. Filcher passed counting away. Barbara laughed.

For Gates the party was not. He danced with Mrs.

Gates with well-dissembled fortitude, and Mrs. Turner, gracious hostess, with convincing courtesy, then quietly but firmly absconded to dim and smoky corners far away. There, where the fumes were thickest, in an atmosphere of poker, stale smoke and cigar-stubs, he found old Hermann Vogel. Vogel had also come, with Mrs. Vogel and Karl. Himself, he had not gone in. Mrs. Gates and Mrs. Vogel were not intensely intimate, and Barbara did not care much for Karl, so that the partners and their wives had not met earlier that evening.

Gates took a seat and a cigar, lighted the cigar, and asked,

"What news from Maugan Grubbs?"

Mr. Vogel, who spoke with the characteristic slowness which did not apply to his thoughts, looked first about the smoking room and then at Mr. Gates. The game went on, and men were sunk in arm-chairs in the somnolent enjoyment of a smashing dinner, good perfectos, and light reading.

Then he cautiously answered,

"Maughan says we're likely to be bothered with the factory votes this year; he says they've got some notion they aren't getting all they ought.

"A man from the Fork came yesterday and talked by the Stevens plant at noon, and —"

"Damn the Fork! I see what's going on up there. Vogel, I've got a lot of thick-skulled chaps who can't tell when they're decently well off.

"I'm afraid some day they're going to make me trouble. I understand what they're after. I was up there only last month, just for the day, and they're getting just as good treatment as they ever did from me. They want a *raise!*"

"Well, you might give it if you have to."

"I will, if I have to. They had one, a cent an hour, two years ago. Now they want another; shorter days, too, damn 'em.

"By the way, I saw old Crimmins, loading in the yard. The old fellow looked seedy, pretty much all in. Wouldn't know him. Seemed to be drinking, acted kind of hard toward me. If I dared, I'd fire the man."

"So. Why not?"

"I would in a minute. Maybe he'd be more trouble than he is there, but . . ."

"Mr. Gates, Mr. Gates!"

"Here, boy. What's the matter?"

"Mrs. Gates, she wants you outside."

"I suppose that settles it, Vogel. Tell Grubbs to get busy and stay at it. What do we keep him for? Good-night."

When Mr. Gates was notified, the party was sure to be over. Mrs. Gates was a good wife, and she quaffed her society to the decent limit.

XVI

A SMALL fire-cracker popped out smartly, and a large red "giant" spoke sedately with a loud, bass bang! from down the street in front of Barbara's.

With the first she stirred a little, restlessly, with the second she awoke to drowsy consciousness that it was morning, and this the Fourth in Mapleton! It was morning indeed, and young. But while Father Gates emitted a sincere and favorite damn, and Mrs. Gates said, "Holden! don't," Barbara stepped lightly out on the floor in her bare feet and walked to the window. She shielded herself behind the lacy curtain, and looked out; while the youthful fiend who had

caused it all ran off with a holiday glee to fresh homes and sleepers new. And as he ran, he cried with all the Independence in his little active body,

"Yeh! Oh, yeh! Fourt' o' July."

Hyperion had opened up the windows of his house, and from great heights sent out his children of the dawn to bid the earth awake. It responded — in every bird and tree and blade of grass, and in the dew-moist housetops and climbing, spear-topped steeples that caught his rays and mirrored them, and sent them back a thousand-fold.

It all looked new and fresh and very fair to Barbara, as if old Father Time had slipped away another day from off his reel of years, and bade it start anew. Before the Gates' the maples towered up in their greenness and precision. A robin returned to the nest she had left when the boy saluted the dawn.

"Barbara! Barbara! Come back to bed. It's four o'clock!" was Hattie's patient contribution to the morning. But the little girl first saw the robin safely home.

She was obedient, more by far than the little, miserable God of Sleep that first had started, then sped away as if not likely to return to her. The child begged to be up and dressed, for if there is a single day in all the year that brings to every little girl the wish to be a boy, it is the Fourth. Hattie, however, carried the question by reminding her that should they get up now they would of course be far too tired to listen to the speaking at the Court House, or to see the pin-wheels and the rockets and the candles shoot off their sparks at night.

So Barbara remained in bed, rather passively, to hear the Court House clock across the way strike one, two, three, four — five. The light nosed in a little

stronger 'round the corner of the shades, but she was quiet, and by-and-by she slept. When they awoke again to general cannonading, it was properly the Fourth.

Breakfast at the Gates' was early for a holiday, as Mr. Gates himself had been elected speaker of the day. Prominent men were chosen, usually ministers, but Mr. Gates was it this year. With business-man ability he had already cogitated just what best to say.

Partaking a shade less heartily than usual, Mr. Gates fared forth for the place of Gates & Vogel. He found Hermann there, with imported ideas. Mr. Vogel hailed from abroad, in the present generation. But he was clever, business-like, educated, an excellent mixer and "jiner." There was also a stenographer, whom Gates had 'phoned from home. He had caught her in time, which was lucky, she being already decided upon a day at Paris on the Moosehead. Paris was down-river. It boasted a thousand people, and as much gayety as they could support.

It is unessential to follow to the flaccid ends of oratory the efforts of the partners and the patience of amanuensis. Mr. Gates dictated; it was copied; it was dictated again. Having with heat torn a first draft to little bits, he began with new fire, again filled a basket, and with a fresh cigar between his teeth returned to the attack. The stenographer continued, remarking mentally that it was all the same, dear me! When finished, she handed it to Gates. He read it, then Mr. Vogel, who checked with pencil, infused it with hearty breath of alien effort and catholic patriotism, and called it good. Whereupon the typewriter plunged for her hat, stopped patting her front hair, felt that the sights of Paris were yet young, and departed.

Delete the remainder of the day, until the hour of

three, to find in body assembled upon the Court House green such crowds of actual and near-by Mapletonians as only fairs or a revival could usually produce. The *Crier* with the dreamy eyes of Mr. Filcher, might well have looked and termed it "representative." A man would have said "packed," a woman "suffocating." Both would have been right, or all three. It was the Fourth. The jam extended from the porches, across the street by Gates', on through the street itself, unjeopardized by traffic. It flowed across the green of the park, upon the benches, among the trees and sometimes in them, to the Bandstand hard-by the Court; it ringed the stand, with its semi-circle of band along the rear, to the clergymen and leading citizens up front. On Decoration Day "disabled veterans and ministers were driven to the graves in carriages"; today each had his proper place before the Court House. Among them the school principal also loomed.

But hark! what is that? *That* is the band, the Mapleton Silver Cornet Military Band. It is playing one of John Philip Sousa's. Did you know it?

The Rev. Sykes, with dedicated mien, stepped forward with conclusion of the air. He looked determined, and he held on. The packed, perspiring people gave way to some minutes of introspection. He prayed, in part, God's blessing upon those who had gone, those who were going, those who had come this day, those who had not come; this country, other countries, the President, all Congressmen; and the speaker of the day. Sweating farmers wiped wet faces on their hands, and wondered if this last were he. Which done, the shepherd rested. The people breathed.

Principal Cadwalader Kelly then followed with something from Lincoln. Whatever it was, the people attended. They listened to the teacher and clapped the

Emancipator. When they were done, Mr. Bodeheaver, set close to Mr. Turner, boldly whispered,

"By gracious! Ain't that fine? Why, but that Lincoln must a been bright an' educated. What frat was he at college, Mr. Turner?"

Mr. Turner was short, sarcastic and sixty. He was a college man, and had some sense. The band tempered Turner's reply.

Old Colonel Hunter rose portentously. Colonel Hunter was Mapleton's traditional leader-in-public. He nominated candidates, proposed toasts, led parades, and introduced speakers. He lent respectability. Colonel Hunter said;

"Ladies, Gentlemen, Associates upon the stand, good people of Mapleton, when it again devolved upon us to select a speaker for this year, one man — almost immediately I may say — occurred to your Patriotic Committee and myself.

"Independence Day breathes of success. It has ever; may it always. We interpret it in various ways, quietly or noisily, with the sound of music, or in the fireworks and explosives dear to boys. But it is all *success*: success of the Colonies, success of this country, success of ourselves.

"To me and to the rest it seemed that on this day we should select as our interpreter, our speaker, a man whose ancestry wholeheartedly contributed to this, the great American success; whose name today betokens still, in every way, all of its earlier measure.

"Ladies, Gentlemen, with pleasure I introduce to you the Honorable Holden Gates, of Mapleton, Hamlin County. Mr. Gates."

At this Mr. Gates, or the Colonel, drew plaudits. Mr. Gates modestly raised his hand. The applause would probably have died then anyhow, but this grace-

fulness capped it well. Porch rockers ceased from creaking, good people shifted to the other foot, the voice of Gates was heard across the green.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, dear fellow-citizens of Mapleton, I feel as I look down upon your eager, happy faces, proud in thinking of this day as I am proud to speak to you, that there is hardly need of *this*, of someone who shall 'interpret' Independence for you, as Colonel Hunter" — bowing toward him — "has so aptly put it."

Upon which Mr. Gates had straightway set about his duty of interpretation. He did so earnestly and long. His was no fear of a crowd. He held them in contempt, proper conception for vigorous speaking. The people liked it well, and Mr. Vogel very much.

But when at the end Mr. Gates cried out, with the proud Framers of the Nation,

"We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this CONSTITUTION for the United States of America — ' "

There was genuine cheering. And as he added,

" — these, then: perfect Union, balanced justice, domestic tranquillity, common defense, welfare, liberty — but most of all *justice, tranquillity, and welfare* — are the great confession of your Faith, the Creed of all our lives — " there was no end to their emotion.

When he and Vogel made a way downtown through crowds and warm congratulations, they found at their office a messenger from Slab Fork. He brought a note from the Eureka Brotherhood which read —

"Unless you raise our wages and give us *homes* that we can live *in* and a little more to live *on*, we shall take a hand ourselves."

Much righteous surprise and honest indignation burst from Mr. Gates.

"You can go back and tell your Brotherhood that Gates says, 'Go to blazes!'"

"You've got your steady work from me for years. What about *me*? *You* go back, and tell them to go slow!"

Little Barbara, strolling in, regarded with naïve surprise the poorly dressed old man who stumbled out to lose himself among the celebrants.

XVII

MAPLETON had its Union Station. Trains of the M. Y. & N. used it, as well as the incoming, or outgoing ones of the Slab Fork narrow-gauge, which last backed their loaded cars close up behind the Station and hauled the empties out again when cargoes had been handled and put aboard the standard lines.

A Boston sleeper went through Mapleton at nine P.M., which, roughly speaking, was the hour when the train from the Fork returned from its Northward trip. "Roughly speaking" was purposely employed in speaking of its schedule, for this it had not, except by how the saws were cutting at the mill or by the loads to be shifted and hauled down to town. The train left at six of a morning. When it came back it was evening. It handled a vast deal of traffic, and always brought home the money.

This evening, in September, there was undue interest in the passing of the nine o'clock. The cause, immedi-

ate, was that a stateroom had been held for Boston. Red would show from the board and the limited probably halt, instead of dropping its mail as it whistled without even a courteous pause, which it usually did.

The railway yard of Mapleton, at night, looked relatively big and busy, for there were many switches, each indexed by its small, squat light; a string of cars one side the rather long freight warehouse; a line of logging empties or tightly loaded flats upon the other. Far up the track, if the night were fair, you saw the narrow profile of the Black Creek bridge. It was all very murky and fine, and apt to be smelly of cinders.

Just as the telegrapher-ticket-agent-baggage-and-station-master hand-pulled an iron brake, so that his semaphore showed "Stop," a machine with blushing headlights threw the dingy red-walled building into very bright relief. When the door of the car was opened a little girl and a lady alighted. The lady said,

"Barbara, where in the world can your father be?"

The little girl said,

"I don't know, Mamma, but he said he'd come, so I know he will."

While they were talking Jerry came forward with a number of bags and cases; the trunks were there already.

"Shall I go in and get the tickets, Mrs. Gates, and check the luggage?"

"Yes, Jerry, and then return and see if you can't find Mr. Gates. He may be at the office."

Barbara was quiet during this, for she had only just come home from Maine. Now she was leaving again. It was a highly recommended school, the finishing kind, near Boston. The Gates had been told it was

expensive and good; Mrs. Gates had heard from Mrs. Hunter that it was fashionable. Her mother would accompany her for one day at the school and a week at the shops.

Jerry reappeared, gave Mrs. Gates the checks and tickets, returned her change, and picked a man-made servant's way back to the car. The agent too came out to ask about the trunks, which seemed to be excess, received the balance due, gave thanks and ambled off, reporting "her" on time.

A minute or two before the hour a whistle sounded somewhere in the blackness. Mrs. Gates fidgeted, said, "Oh, where *is* your Father!" but this was not their train. Five minutes later a tail-lighted caboose showed up behind the Station, the lanterns dim at first, then burning brighter as the logging train puffed loudly and backed in.

Another blast shrilled out, an automobile's siren sounded too. The train for Boston made the bend, passed noisily across the iron bridge and lost its speed. Mr. Gates ran up, gave Mrs. Gates a reassuring bill-roll and a careless tap, received from Barbara a loving little hug, and bestowed a kiss. He walked along the wooden platform with them. The coal-faced, white-garbed porter met them with all respect, took from the following Jerry his load of bags, saw everyone and everything on board, and the train was gone.

Jerry cranked up and Mr. Gates entered his car. The string of Pullmans roared from sight around a curve, as a bent, poorly-clad man, with a stout young boy as neatly and as badly garbed, stepped from the smoky caboose. They walked in the direction of the town, uncertainly. The boy carried their canvas telescope; the man walked as though tired. The Gates car passed them as they reached the street, in *time to take its dust.*

REFINEMENT

XVIII

IT pointed east, past a round dozen of empty lots, over a grumbling bridge thick-plastered with stories of stock shows and patented nostrums, on by a signboard or three as well as the shop of a blacksmith, till finally it reached to the heart of the town, this road that led from the station and into the village of Mapleton. As if its mission ended and there was no further use, its dry, uneven surface left you there, right at the door of Dave's.

Dave's, acknowledged *solar plexus* of local hospitality, dull conviviality and easy sociability to boot, was also the beginning of "downtown." The road from the railroad ended, and there at its end stores and markets began. All things were Dave's. His letterheads, as well as cryptically declaiming livery, bath, a room for pool, drummers' headquarters, steam heat and bar, said also, "in the business part of the town." The house of David was the core. It smacked of roller towels, and smelled of cabbage. Its painted sign bespoke your trade; its weight, upheld by magic, made threats against your head.

Its rambling stoop and foot-scored rail delineated Mekka. On mellow evenings, such as this, hard chairs cracked lazily with dull itinerants who had teetered on Brod Watts' boxes until that worthy snuffed the coal-oil lamps and closed his general store with many a backward glance of circumspection to be sure: (1) that every light was out; (2) the last slug ousted;

(3) the bolts shoved tight on small-paned windows and loose-hung, swaybacked doors. That attained, the living, moving part of the store hitched itself over to Dave's, where they welcomed the hour of ten with many a hard-sucked pipe and a quorum of well-worked quid. Nothing changed, nor cheered the votaries save the arrival of the "nine," and that itself but seldom thrilled the transient trade enough to quit good chairs and meet it. They did not even need to; Dave's bus drove back and brought it to them.

To-night the train had whistled with usual vigor, sighted the town, and left it again to whirl on South. In proper time the well-used 'bus bumped over the bridge, plumbed the rut in front of the blacksmith's sufficiently to test vehicular and human ribs, and halted in front of the place with its burningly eager stoop-full. Appeared Dave, who ran to a place by the steps, cried "Back 'er back!" to the driver, and opened the door himself as the latter answered his bidding. Eleven holeproof rockers quit work and ceased from creaking; six jaws abandoned pipes; five stopped their champing for a minute-portion; while chairs and jaws resumed their normal function and disappointed life pressed on as one bored, well-satcheled travelling man reluctantly surrendered all to Dave. He had "made" their town before.

The nine and its attendant 'bus had gone. The last nocturnal excitement was paling to a talk on favorite sons and tax assessors when two black figures showed beneath the corner light, one long and rather warped, the other shortly upright, both coming on toward Dave's. They failed of being natives, for they *entered* the hotel. One or two went in behind to see more what they looked like. They sauntered back to say that those inside "seemed like they wan't much."

The travelling man had dropped his bags, picked up a case, and gone to make a late call on "the trade." Dave sat alone, attempting to decide whether to put his man in 23, "with wardrobe," or in 19, "double-window." But the pent-up figure by the desk quit work as the rough-tapped boots of the pair walked on his floor and fell afoul his cogitations. "Sun-burnt faces, big red hands, seedy clothes, cheap telescope: the Fork" — the hotel man, that fortune-teller, checked them off. He did not trouble to get up, for Dave was a veteran landlord. Not so much to look at, for he was bright of hair and whisker as of nose, and his chin had been a disappointment, there were some maintained that Dave was over-rated. But Ezra Bodeheaver asseverated stoutly that "Dave Wilkinson could do more on less sense than any man in Mapleton." Ezra was modest.

When the elder of the two had reached the desk, he asked whether or not there was room for the night. He *was* a stranger, this last. You recollect Firemen's Convention, ten year back? Dave's hotel had never been full but once; that was it.

"Yep. One dollar. Advance," came as the prompt return, and Dave produced the book.

Dave's had a register. Few names of antecedent governors or living Congressmen appeared athwart its year-browned sheets. He kept it for poor strangers. "Book-keeping was too gosh-fired much of a nuisance," *he* "didn't bother none." The stranger scratched upon a blotty surface, "Andrew Johnson, Slab Fork," then added, "and son." From a pocket frayed at the edges he fumbled a bill that had also seen service, and gave it to the man behind the desk. Johnson did not take it from a roll nor from a pocket-book. It was a lonesome dollar, for Johnson reached it out as though he hated

to disturb the faintly-jingling coins and the few remaining there. He had *worked* six hours for the departed. Formality met, the host conducted them along and up a pair of crooked and reproachful stairs. At the end of a third-floor hall they stopped. No need to turn a key. The host held his fluttering lamp in one hand while he turned the knob with the other, and the three stepped into the room.

It was comfortably furnished with gloom. The corners and the sides were camouflaged in dusk. Dave's rooms were bearable in spring and fall; he "aimed to give a dollar's worth." In the fluttery light of the lamp one saw two chairs that managed very well to stand alone; a piece of furniture improbably a dresser, though with a pair of shallow drawers and patient, spotted mirror at its back; a bed that showed two brownish quilts, two thin, anemic pillows, and a hollowed center; a low, dull-painted stand with crowded standing-room for a shallow bowl and empty, nicely cracked pitcher. Pine lumber carpeted the floor, and an odd, exotic blossom papered the wall, while over the ceiling a few flies stalked uncertainly in the light of the wick below.

Since the register said Slab Fork, the cubicle was large, quite cozy, all but luxury. Dave set his lamp upon the dresser, where some of the light was caught by the glass and faintly cast over the room.

He then left for a pitcher of water, ran downstairs and up again, returned it to the washstand, yelled "Goo' night," and was gone.

The lad had dropped the telescope he carried, and the two sat down. The elder, rather, sank down. The boy's face was tired as he turned to his father.

"Hard trip, eh, Son?" said the man, and the little fellow nodded wearily. "You'll like it though, I *know*,

when you've sort of got the hang," he went along, to keep up his spirits as well. "Why, if I could 'a gone to school, real like, 'way back when I was small, there isn't anything I wouldn't gladly done to make it go. But did I get it? Not much, Son, they took me out of school almost afore I quit short pants. Sometimes I've sort of thought if I'd gone back a lot o' things would worked out different.

"But here I am, Andy, as far as I'll go. I'm old, and I'm tired. I never turned the trick."

They were undressing now. They didn't wash, for the pitcher was small and they would need the water when they woke. Besides, they came from the Fork; people did their splashing in the morning. Johnson turned off the light. Then he talked again. Andy was very quiet; each felt a little awkward of the other. The boy was full of thoughts that come the first time he quits his home; the father, disappointed, old, trying to launch a life where his had swamped, was looking forward.

His vision was very clear. He reached an arm to where the lad lay in the hollow of the limp, worn bed.

"What is it?" said the boy, a little tremor in his voice. He knew no father but a man of unresponsiveness. This one was different. Somehow, it was hard.

"Andy, son, I want to talk a bit before you go to sleep. It won't hurt you, and 'll do me good. You're young, but thinkin' back I see a whole lot plain that a man who's worked his time can maybe put to a lad in a few plain words, and save him a year or so, some o' the heartaches too.

"I know that I ain't smart or good enough to talk, but I c'n only live again — in you. You've got to go on where I quit, and I don't want you ever lookin' back, as I am now, and say 'My daddy never bothered

me with anythin' like that when I grew up, and left my home.' My father was all right, but he didn't take no stock in education, home or other kind. I mostly learned by accident, and I remember. I learned late, too late to do much good.

"If I could say a word to boys, afore they start, I'd say 'Boy, fight shy of a drink. Tastes bad enough at first, but there's a far worser taste that you won't get till afterwards.' The popular boy in the bar-room ain't near so high-up in the mill. And he'll be less so, every year! You can't afford it, Andy. It don't go to prove you're a good one, taking a drink. It sets you up as young, more like a fool. Brace up to a man! I've played with it sometimes. If you hanker to work with your hands, to sweat for your life, to slave for your bread — why, take it! If you want your brain to wrestle, I say, 'Hold up!' Hand-workers can't afford it, and others don't want to.

"There's a couple o' things I'm leavin' with you. That's one; and t'other's harder. Here it is. Be careful with the women. They'll help you, mighty much, to make your gait and fix the place you'll get to. If they're no good, you can't afford 'em. You've seen, at the Fork. You're young, but remember — gay clothes, and smilin' faces; happy with happiness they don't no longer feel; and — nothing left to lose.

"Remember your mother, boy. I ain't very much, but I always like to think of every woman like I do of her. Treat 'em so. If they ain't good, leave 'em, for you'll lose. But if they are, don't ever dare to make them less so. Someone'll have to pay.

"Maybe it seems it ain't so wrong to reach for what is offered. It is, for you're the man. When some day, most like you will, you find a woman you want, look at yourself. Be sure you've got as much

to give as her. Women forgive a sight, but get a good, clean start. You can't forgive yourself.

"Such things I've wanted, though maybe missed . . . the country too! It was not always mine. But now it is! Whole lots o' things are new and queer to me, most like to you. But never to forget the country and the home. They will be watching."

The old man never talked just so before. The words gained strength from his heart, significant eloquence from blundered life. But at the end they failed him, and his voice broke. Andy said little, and they were quiet. Probably they were asleep.

XIX

SMOKE trails hung over the track, and in the rocky old caboose that trailed the train of logging empties Andy watched his father, going home. So faded the Fork. He felt again that father's very first embrace. It was *all* of him.

The boy did not seem hungry, nor even very tired after Dave's. He did not feel so very much of anything. The baggy telescope lay at his feet. It had not been opened since they left the Fork, as neither needed anything to spend a night. Their day began at Dave's at five that morning. The logging train might make the Fork in time for work. His father took it.

He raised the bag, and started back toward town. A jolting milk-wagon spilled a little of its foamy load his way, and a passing buggy coated him with dust. The telescope was heavy; they all passed by. A clattering again loomed up behind. Once more he shrank to the side of the road, but the horse's feet and

the wheels slowed down till a voice rang out, crisp and fresh as the day.

"Hi, son, where be you goin'!"

The boy looked up. His head just overtopped the nearest wheel, and over it he saw a shaggy head and bearded, red-cheeked face set on some splendid shoulders. He was big and looked safe.

"Goin' far, son?"

"No, just school."

"Well, hop in, an' ride along," countered the man, moving a part of his bulk a bit toward the side of the seat, "and reach me up that telescope. I ain't goin' far myself, but I might's well as not give ye a little lift. In fact, I'd ruther.

"You look a fairish sort, I'd say," giving a sort of smile, "ever been here before?"

"Nope, never been here before."

"Well, seems like you ain't much stuck on it, neither," he went along, as the buggy rattled over the bridge to stop by a little shop. "Never mind, though, son, you'll *like* it, I jest know you will. Look like you *was* that sort.

"Sorry I can't go no farther, but this's my shop and I'm late a'ready. Blacksmithin' don't wait for no one, least of all the smithy. Now up towards Dave's, a little to the left, then on along State and to the right you go. Can't miss it. The school? she's by the Court House, back amongst the trees. So long, and come see 'Hub' Sanders so be you ever git lonesome with yer books."

"Good-by," gravely replied the lad, taking the telescope, "and — and — thank you, Hub!" The big man grinned, waved him a huge, dark hand, and opened up his shop.

Morning brightened Andy's spirits. It was early

day. Occasional curls of smoke wound out the chimneys he could see from Main Street. Here and there a frowsy grocer boy undid his doors and windows, and hauled out sprawling board-made benches on which he shortly piled the best of Hamlin County produce. Some factory hands were getting on to work, and a country girl in a blue-checked dress snapped her whip out loud as an old horse plodded by with a load of squash and turnips, and rattling, shiny cans. Dawn was come, as up among the hills black stacks were soiling the warming sky, and men in dark, coarse shirts and long-patched overalls were handling logs and boards and boxes the while they sang, or talked, or cursed each other, cursed, talked, or sang the hours and months and years away.

But while his mind dragged on with them, his feet had got him from Main Street to State. Small, waking stores gave way to larger, calmly sleeping houses. The early air had in it the breath of frosty nights and pungent days, of fields in harvest, large, brown pumpkins, and the shocked-up corn in rows. The houses passed and scrutinized were easily the largest he had seen in all his life, and he was brushing sixteen now. Some had three stories, with a little one on top. They *must* be rich. He would like a house with a garret; if he had he wouldn't sleep there, either. Garrets weren't much.

He shortly saw a great old building, with a clock. But on the other side, well back inside a grove, there stood a second edifice of brick. Its roof was packed in moss. Above the door there was carving, "The Free Academy of Mapleton," and the letters, in-grown with lichens and colored with rain, looked almost as large as the building. Maybe they stood for something. A flag walk entered the yard. He followed it inside.

Early-risen heads poked out of many windows, and a comradely voice exclaimed, "Hey! there! Where'd you get that hat?" Puckered-up lips piped a country tune. The sport increased as he approached. The friendly door was far away; and he might never reach it! His sagging bag was torture. However, in less than a minute he had mustered a doubtful knock. The noise above apprising him, if not the knock, the door was quickly opened by one of pedagogic leanings. He was round, horn-spectacled, a man of near-feminine niceness. He seemed a proper person, though not the hairy sort.

"Come in, child, come in. I think you are the little boy we expected last night," he added rather kindly, opening the door enough to let in Andy and the bag.

"Your name is Andrew Johnson, isn't it?" he asked when they were both inside.

"Yes'm," said Andy, shifting feet.

"Well, we are just sitting down to breakfast," said his host, whose name was Mr. James. "Have you eaten?"

"No, sir, I haven't," and he might as well have added, "not since I left the Fork." That, though, was not Andy. He was rather silent in his own house; elsewhere, he was dumb.

"Come right upstairs, then. We can take your bag along and put it in your room before we breakfast." He left it to the boy, changed his mind, took it himself, and led the way. Up a winding staircase it went, at top to another, down a dim hall, past many doors, by hordes of boys. They eventually stopped.

Mr. James did not knock, and they surprised a long, lean fellow who was trying to arrange a round, brushy cowlick to the best advantage of a yellow head.

"Ah, Moore, I fear you will be late. The second

bell has rung. You must not let the little things of life detract from more serious aspects. Dress more quickly, or plan to rise earlier."

"Yes, sir."

"And, Moore, this is Andrew Johnson. He has come to room with you. Try to make him at home. I shall leave your bag here, Johnson. Come below, both of you, as soon as you are ready."

Mr. James left.

Andy looked at the room. All rented lodgings are bad, these were almost free. He inspected the other boy.

"What's your name?"

"Crampton."

"'Cramp?' Cramp-what?"

"Heh! don't try to be funny, or I'll bump your head. Drop your bag and quit starin'. Let's go to breakfast."

Andy's intentions having been pacific, even amiable, they started off. The other's temper was equally so, for he took no part in the fun-making which met them at the dining-room. The place was large. It was also full — full of boys and girls, noisy, eating. All stopped to see. The styles of the Fork were local, a matter of something to wear. Girls giggled. The boys' reception was not so refined, as four or five shied remarks or slanted food fragments to welcome the rare little figure. But saggy coat and calico shirt, large feet in stubbed-out shoes, brief sleeves that early lose their arms and reddened hands, tan stockings patched in black, and pants not free of reenforcement *are* a joy.

Their stroll was long. The morning had been full of gauntlets. If Andy were aware of what progressed, he gave no sign at the table. The master at the head

promptly filled up a plate, the pupil worked in an efficient silence.

A bell cut short the meal. Conducted by his roommate, Andy passed from dining-room to study-hall, where fresher troubles met with novel pleasures.

He was sampled in several classes, and proved to doubting masters that Slab Fork had a share of "r's." Tried again at recess, he determined for the pupils that certain of the woodsbred knew other things than boards. A clever lad, Cramp said his name was Vogel, pointed a joke at Andy's *foreign* look and funny ways. Obliging, Andy seized the boy about his neck and urged him down. Intentions went still further, but the bell rang.

With night there followed weak, stray thoughts. It came to Andy that though the Fork was bare, poor, cold, the logger's hut still had a store of homely qualities. Andy resolved to write a letter, which showed how much his depths were moved, for Andy was fifteen and very normal.

Crampton's books preempted the small pine stand that served in many things, by night for research. Andy was new, without too much of lodging house resourcefulness. His eye roved for a bit. The dresser was high, the wash-stand low and full and rather splashy. The chairs were two, as also the boys. In a corner, packed as when it left Slab Fork, squatted the serviceable form of Andy's telescope. Lifting it not without effort to a knee, he then sat down again, thinking perhaps to unpack it. The telescope was full and plump, if lumpy. Suppose he write his letter on it.

"Heh, Cramp, through with the ink?"

"Yeah, just a minute, what'chu want it for?"

"Write a letter. Got some paper?"

"Sure, here y'are, ink too. Take the table."

"No, you aren't hardly through with it. I c'n use this all right," added the boy, keeping the wrinkled, seamy bag upon his knee.

A pen and blotter hurtled by air-line, and ink came thence by two long arms that reached and met. He started work. And doubt not that it was work. Have you ever been fifteen? His head for some moments received a share of the scratching that soon was audible as the blunted schoolboy pen began to crawl across the paper. It did not scratch there long, nor fast, and where a canvas rib came through the telescope appeared occasional bumps and splashes. The ink was of the thickish mellow type obtaining in the boarding-house and country school, the paper of the sort the best ancestors used. The youth bore heavily and conscientiously upon the paper, and over half a page he made his mark. Errors and blots illuminated it. His mother kept it.

"Dear Mother: —

Father brought me down to here the other night. He was with me that night, and then he went home in the morning. That was this morning. We stayed at a hotel all night, and did not get up till the train went out at five or six o'clock. It has been a long day. I am getting tired.

This morning a man named 'Hub' gave me a ride. He is a blacksmith, and he has a shop where he shoes horses.

I have a room-mate. I call him 'Cramp.'

I miss you very much, so I will close.

Love, from Andy."

Laughter from Cramp broke in on letter-making.

"Ha! This is *good*, Andy. I couldn't get the answer to a problem in this book, so I found it in the back and worked the darn thing hindwards."

Andy was mildly interested. Up at the Fork they didn't have such books, an Algebra. They didn't have answers in the back, either; in fact, according to Miss Myra, most of her charges lacked answers about the back of their heads. Andy saw the light by Crampton's aid. The latter, undeniably elated by his late afflatus, proposed a trip below.

"We can go to the library, Andy. You're supposed to study, but there's other books too. Sometimes, when I'm all through studying for an evening, I go down and read."

"Read what, Cramp?"

"Oh, lots of things. 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' once, and then I got hold of 'Arabian Nights,' too, but they put that away. Too exciting, they told me. Come on."

They went, and while Crampton prospected for exciting covers, Andy for the first time in his life browsed about a few shelves-full of books. It was wonderful. There surely were a hundred, anyway. They looked like a lot. He turned the pages of a few that must have caught the eye of several schoolboy generations, for their corners were slanting away and they had much-torn leaves and weak backs. Next he saw some of the others, carelessly at first. Curious, *these* interested him. Many of the leaves were still as fresh, uncut, as when some master's hand had placed the volumes there long years ago. The boyish touch had passed them by. Poems at the Fork were neither current nor believed. He stole a look at one — what was it, now? "When the green gits back on the trees," and he was back among the trees himself, a fish-pole in his hand,

some bait beside his feet, a bluish cloud-flecked sky above, when Crampton's voice cut in,

"Aw, let's go, Andy. Getting late."

The fish-pole dropped from his hands, the greening trees faded away, and he answered,

"Yes, we'll go."

But he marked that place with a fragment of paper.

Again they were upstairs, beside the telescope which Crampton's curiosity and kindness, mixed, helped to persuade the other should be opened for disposal of his "things."

"And I'll give you the bottom drawer of the dresser, Andy, with one side of the wash-stand."

The sack was opened. Its filler was a motley mess of clean red handkerchiefs, a piece of soap, a good-sized, red-edged towel and brace of hose; the bulk a pair of real gum boots, in the stamp of his father's size. The rest, what there was, he wore. There was not even a fall tonic. But as they were having a little boy-like talk before undressing, they heard a laugh out in the hall. Mr. James knocked, and opened their door.

He said, "There's a man here to see you, Andrew." Mr. James suggested "*what* a man," though Andy hardly noticed. "It's after hours, of course, but he said that it was important and that he was leaving in the morning, so I had him come right up."

The laugh rang again. Andy rose and looked out. He saw why. Boys' heads were out of doors and a rough, clumsy fellow stood there. He wouldn't have looked that way at the Fork, but Andy had been from there a day. He couldn't have laughed, yet he saw why the others had. The yeast of education was at work.

"Bill Boddfish!" cried the lad, as the big fellow reached in and seized his hand with a painfully sincere clasp.

"Remember, Andrew, it is very late," put in the master. Right there Bill, flushing from the laughter and the teacher's words, came in and came to a point as he had never done back home.

"It's just this, Andy," said the man, "the boys in Eureky, back home, had a meetin' last night. They thought as mebbe, they thought as how you might, well they got to thinkin' mebbe you would need a little somethin' down here, and though we ain't none of us anyways rich, nor the Lodge neither, and most like can't afford it, they sent me down tonight to give you *this*. And to say 'Good luck, boy, we hope you'll win!' If there's anythin', any time, as old Bill Boddfish or any others of the boys can do for ye, just let us know, and I tell ye, we'll be there!"

Andy had no time to reply when the rough-clad man, gripping his fingers again, was out of the room. Laughter denoted his progress.

Andy had a look at the dirty-wrapped parcel thrust in his hand. There was a little bunch, and a paper. Inside the lump, so Crampton said, for he had never seen the sort before, were three ten-dollar pieces, gold. The paper held a grimy note, just "From the boys at home. Don't never forget them. They won't you."

Bill Boddfish had another call to make that night. It was not far off, and he did not tarry.

Holden Gates' was across the street. As surroundings and hospitality varied, so was there distinction in the greetings of Eureka. Again he brought and left a note. It also had effects, immediate. Boddfish returned scowling to the autumn witchery of that night. Gates went thoughtful to a whiskey-soda and a fine grate fire. "At it again," he mused, and felt the sharp prod of the note.

Smiling, he made a paper spiral of it. It caught from

the blaze. After all you might only call it a warning. He moved the spoon easily in the glass, and lit a fresh cigar.

XX

WE knew a boy, we find a man. Graduation and commencement were nearby. Five years of Mapleton's Academy drew to a close, five years of work, of study, of struggle — of struggle to bring to a common end the threads of many things that more than once had almost unravelled out. There were self-sacrifice and hardship, at the Fork. There was adversity at Mapleton. Together they goaded the boy. Eureka sometimes came to the fore, and looked up. He never sent to them.

It was five years of managing.. He saw little of his fellows and their homes; that would have taken clothes. He did not recreate; that would have needed time. He did not dissipate; that would have eaten money. He spent a portion of the day in studying, the rest in working to continue. He accepted sacrifice, and returned courage. Holidays and Sabbaths were an opportunity, for extra effort. Days were for labor, nights for bad dreams. He had his feet hard on the ground. It was his way, and also kept the holes from showing in the soles.

If you are fortunate, and think of life in terms of bills and notes and metal dollars, be well enough content. If you are not, then wait for today and hope for tomorrow. The Arabs have it that "When fortune bringeth thee affliction, console thyself by remembering that one day thou must see prosperity, and another day, difficulty. . . ." Only this was all difficulty.

If Andrew had had less resource he probably would not have made it; if he had done less he could not. The Fork gave away an old little boy. The town of Mapleton took him as he was, worked him, drove him, hurt him, buffeted, outraged, shaped and inspired him, and made of him an old young man. He took five years where teachings came in books, and in that school where learning came from life. He browsed haphazardly on many things, and landed hard on one or two, among these elocution. His school was study, his parties were work. His marks were passing, his work was vital. He liked cake, but he grew up on bread.

Short vacation periods he spent in Mapleton. There was a factory where he earned a little. In winter, through a man up at the Fork who knew the foreman, he also got a job in town at taking stock. The plant was shut down, and they let him work at night scaling lumber, because he knew his subject fairly well. It did not take long, but it helped him to spend his time when there was nothing to do but study. He did that when he went home. Odd times like Saturdays he filled in at this plant, working at piece rates that usually tobogganed down as your production rose. It was a touch of home.

Andrew's birthright had not been pride. If pride had been born at the Fork, it would have died in Mapleton, so it was better. He understood the shoveling of snow. Odd times he had a chance as waiter for affairs of large proportion. He washed his own clothes, and others' dishes. Most generally he had his pay, such as there was, in cash. Sometimes it had been clothes, twice it was pipe lead no longer used for water. The first he sold, five pounds of it, at T. E. Brodribb Watts', five cents the pound. That after-

noon more work and better wages for the same old lady had netted some ten pounds in twisted coils. The bottom dropped out of the market. The hardware husband of the social matron said the price had fallen since that morning. Things never fell that way in Mapleton. He got three cents, with an insight into Mr. Watts' success.

Starting the long warm spell of summer he rode the caboose to the Fork, where he reverted to the life of yesterday. He lived in the home of the Johnsons, and all things were as he had left them. Nothing had altered, save that his father looked much older, his mother far more tired if such could be. His little brother had followed the way, short months of childhood and school, and then the years of the mill. When he was able, George should also have a chance. At present Andrew was the only luxury they could afford. He knew this, and he did not like it, but it was the only path that led away. His father still worked, though perhaps not so hard. The Company did not pay him more, but on the other hand they had not "cut" his wages.

Too old for the place and boxes of his breaking-in, Andrew spent his summers in the sawmill, often in the place that Hans had filled. He was paid not less and neither was he paid a cent more than men who had brought young lives to the Fork, who offered them unsparingly; and decades later had them given back, poorer, weak and frayed, and very badly twisted. And though it was a thing he knew, and understood, he hated it. He hated it — but not as the rest of the Fork. From endurance and submission, then final conquest, their hate was passive, cold. It was not the wholesome hate of hope, but the all-damned abandonment of despair.

One day, it was a Sunday, Andrew climbed far up a thinly timbered hill that topped the morbid place below. He needed fresher air. Up there, he stopped to rest; then gained his feet again, and rising shook a knotted fist at what he saw. "And I will smash you yet," he cried. But just then clouds of smoke rose up, hid all, and seemed to taunt him.

In leaving the Fork and reaching Mapleton each fall, he merely parted with work, and love, for work and places that did not know him, had not troubled to understand him, and always largely ignored him. Which allowed him to hold a lead in school, and carry out his purpose. As a boy he was not unsocial, and he undoubtedly did not enjoy life entirely shut in by school-room, teachers and pupils. However, it was all he could afford. Wait just a little; he would snatch a taste of life less bitter than the acrid draught he knew.

Andrew's friends along the close were largely those he made at first. To Crampton he was warmly attached, and the sentiments that he himself inspired varied from the fist-compelled respect of Karl Vogel to a very real and patent liking owned by nearly all the rest. His excellent preceptors looked for him to go far, and Mr. James had often said, "A *lovely* child." Which he was not, being largely the shape and size of a man. Yet he was not bad to look at, for his eyes were warmly blue and frankly honest, his hair had slowly turned from very light to a brown like ripened cornsilk, and his frame was stout and straight. His hands showed work, his voice held a very slight ring of experience, and there was nothing hesitant about him.

At the commencement of his course Andrew was mostly innocent of funds; at his leave-taking he was still more free of debt. Between the two there lay

a highly taut financial era, but the final balance was a credit.

The mill that made him produced a man. They used to say he had 'most everything but clothes; he might have been a *gentleman*. Men liked him, boys admired him, old ladies trusted him, and no young women knew him.

Commencement time had come to Mapleton. It was a siege of inventories. Taking stock two days before, Andrew found in his and Crampton's room a stack of books. He was not looking for books. He was looking for a shirt and hat fit to appear at Mapleton's Grand Opera House the second night succeeding, when the graduates, among them these boys, were slated to be seated on the stage, examined by an audience, in turn examining, hearing their middle names read out in full by Mr. Turner, and in all good time receiving their diplomas, with ribbon.

A distant future held forth no disquietude. It could only with great pains outstrip the past. Immediately, though, there was that shirt and hat. Johnson had known for some time that in the realm of shirts there is judicious virtue in a pair of scissors, likewise, in terms of hats, in close employment of the brush. Andy's had been virtuous for very long, and there are limits.

Crampton was out. For that matter, Crampton usually was. He was not poor, for his people were well-to-do folk at the other end of the county, that part of Hamlin which is lowland, rich-soiled, prosperous. His days were partway spent in study, his evenings socially, for he was popular and clever. Odd times he reported for the *Crier*, and had nourished aspirations of a better press. The two shared much, but there are things which nearly everyone would keep,

alone. His poverty was one of Andrew's. It was apparent enough, but Crampton did not see it.

Johnson fondled his books. Rapidly he sized them up. Once they held knowledge, and now perhaps some other good might be squeezed out of them. The method was not new to him. It is a question if many money-gaining chances were, though as he often told himself, it was remarkable how seldom any of them "took." Appraising carefully, he was not long in making up his choice.

There was a place the buying public knew as "Mapleton's Cheap Store." Said public took the title's "cheap" to mean that that was how and what they bought — the firm. The public was on one occasion right, for everyone had opportunity to pay as much for what was sold as any place in town. The firm was Filcher & Schwab. Yes, it was he, of the *Crier*. The Store was close to the *Crier*. Mr. Schwab owned all of the *Crier* and part of the store. It was the widest advertised emporium in town; he had to fill up the paper with something. Their bargains were known so far as the *Crier* was heard in the hills, about three miles out.

Monopoly may thrive in cities. It often shows the great good taste to choose a country place, and Filcher & Schwab confessed and easily assumed a growing trade, for they alone sold schoolbooks. Mild education was really taking "holt" round Mapleton, so that each partner had his buggy, with a horse to draw him of a Sunday. They did a nice business; their wives went out.

Andrew repaired to this exclusive place. Mr. Filcher was in, behind the counter where fountain pens were lying in their dust. As he saw the pile of second-handed books, the partner's smile paled visibly, as he had

looked for sales. This was not quite so good. Mr. Filcher, you will remember, was "afflicted." Yet his blue eyes saw life bravely, searchingly, as if looking for something he could not find. This, however, meant no inability to sense, commercially.

Andrew deposited six books. The man of business picked them up. He laid down the six, and selected one. He focussed on it, and bent to look it through and through as fingers spun the pages. His nose sped up and down between the leaves and seemed to smell the ink and run down all the turned-in corners.

"H-m-m, pencil marks. Ah! a blot. Cover spoiled. Corners of this one *bad*. H-m-m." He found no good in any of the six, and Johnson longed for more and better books. He tasted the worst. It came.

"A dollar and twenty-six, young man. Aren't really *worth* it, but if you'll leave them all I guess we can allow you that. Of course you don't care for the money, do you? just want to take it out in trade? You *do*? Here, always want to help you out in any way we can. Good-bye, come again."

Their generosity had indigestion, Andrew mused, as he took the change and left. Reflecting on the deal, he offered gratitude that old Filcher's eyesight was no better. With this addition to his buying power, he had in due time in his room a graduation shirt and hat, slightly worn.

That night the logging train brought down a little box. He got it in the Post Office and went on home. He usually did, and to-night his graduation theme was not complete. It was very light, this package, and small, and the address was in his mother's dear, stiff, hand. There was a card inside. That, too, was in her writing, as was also a crumpled note. The latter said

"Congratulations to my dear. We think of you and wish it was a hundred more."

The card again came to his notice, "From Father." What could it be?

"Open it, and you'll find out," suggested the practical Crampton, just leaving for the evening.

He cut the cord, and tore a little piece of yellow paper. A small, flat object met his touch, an edge exposed to view and there was something he well knew. Cramp glimpsed a gold piece, and went out.

Andrew saw more, and something in him gave way. Thin, the brand of America rusted by time, he knew it; "1860" said the faint-raised figures near the edge; unfolding, he saw another day.

There is a man, young, strong, in flush of life. He is in uniform, and has a gun. There are other men. Together all jump from a shallow bit of ditch; shots, a part of them advance; they run, shouting, firing, loading. Half left, a third, but these go on. They gain the top. Andrew is a boy again. He is sitting by his father's side. The boy is at the Fork, but the soldier gains the hill.

Sometime an army pay-day comes. The first war-envelope contains the bit of gold. There was probably never a later day when the man could not have used it; there were times when it needed to go. The old man had given much.

The next night was the last before his graduation. There were exercises at the Hall, an entertainment for the Seniors by the Juniors. Andrew was ready to leave the School when a man swung up the old, long walk. He hurried. It was the conductor of the Slab Fork train, just now come in. John Williams was a *Mapletonian*, but knew the folk of the Fork.

"Andy, son, I've got bad news for you," he blurted out. John had sympathy instead of tact.

"Why, what is it, John?" asked the lad. "None of the people are . . . ?"

"Well, the fact is, your father . . ."

"Come, quick! What is it?"

"Well, your father, he was pretty sick today, sudden-like, and . . ."

"Yes, yes, go on."

"Your mother wanted me to send for you, because tonight, tonight—he died." He could add nothing more, rested his arm for a moment about the bowed shoulders of the boy, and left.

Soon after daylight, on the morning of his graduation, Andy climbed aboard the dirty red caboose of Williams' logging train. The ride was full of bitterness, and memories, and slipping confidence. The sun shone, and the birds cried out as always from the burnished foliage; but the forest of trees looked black, the singing pierced his heart. Clouds of smoke eddied and swirled from the squat dark stack of the "logger," and it choked his voice and filled his eyes, and turned his clothing black. The ride was long, the caboose rocketing back and forth with twistings of the rails. The train crawled away from the fertile country, into a fringe of timber, out of it then to brush land. Not for miles could Andrew catch a hint of what the early land was like before man came to rip His handiwork away. Clouds gradually edged up across the sky, and it was raining at the Fork.

Pete was there with his democrat, and Charlie Wall to help in lowering a shook-built box from one of the forward cars. All shook his hand, and Charlie whispered "We must be submissive." In driving to

the store, Pete spoke to one who shared their wagon-top against the rain, "The cemetery sure is filling up," and the companion answered him, "Yeh, it ain't a very nice day for a funeral."

During the service it rained. Water trickled down the walls of the closed little room where they sat, and the roads to the hill were mud.

The next day the sun shone again, and Andy walked with his mother to the newest mound, now gone perhaps, that morning bare and sloping, sprinkled with little stones and sunk with the marks of stamping feet. As they had passed the Company's store on their way, a flag in the window caught his mother's eye.

"Your father, how he loved the flag," she thought, and said as much. Andrew darted in, and bought it. It was not a large flag, and it was not silk, but it was the only one the Company had. Somehow, the Fork did not seem to run so very much to things like that. Yet this had been expensive, for its ransom was the old gold-piece.

For many weeks the symbol played above the man who thought it good. The rains fell on it. They streaked the field of blue with white and ran the red with blue, but the suns of June and July and the early autumn caressed it, warmed it, and the cotton dried.

Long before Andrew had gone back to Mapleton. He had had his Commencement.

XXI

A **PIECE** of fortune, good fortune, developed on Johnson's return. Crampton met him as the logging train wheezed in that night, Crampton now "of the *Crier*."

The two walked over-town together. En route the

latter said, "Say, Andy, remember telling me you'd like to study law some time? Well, I was talking with Mr. Gates today, just interviewing him about a little matter, understand, and he said, 'Moore, where's that young chap Johnson I used to see around with you?' I told him how you'd had to leave here for awhile, and he added, 'Seems to me he used to think he'd like to study law. Isn't that right?' I said I thought it was. So he wants to see you about it. Probably he's in his office now."

He was. Yes, Gates & Vogel needed a boy. He'd have a chance to study law. They really wanted a chap for the inkwells and waste baskets, so one had suggested a student, as it reversed the obligation, and saved a bit on wages.

Some time before his graduation Johnson had settled on the law as the readiest means to an end. A connection with Holden Gates would hardly, ordinarily, have struck the proper chord. Yet why not? Gates, did you trace it back, had almost brought him here. Carry it a little further: let him provide the education. It was not the firm he would select, given a larger field, but since no Blackstone offered, here was Gates. He already knew the firm somewhat from having done small jobs in after-hours. These jobs had attracted, he believed, some amiable notice; and not much money. Hermann Vogel and Holden Gates were two successful, modern men. There was also Mr. Busby, but he needs treatment by himself.

The evening's interview was straightly business-like. If the elder knew Johnson to be of the Fork, he did not say so. Neither did Johnson, and if the former were even aware it must have recommended Johnson, for there was one thing Gates was sure — he *understood* the Fork.

Plenty of dusty books, small wages and a lodging were provided. Questions of his work were not ignored. They came to terms, and by another day Johnson's still movable and somewhat meagre goods were all transferred to a room above the office. It was a little place, close by the school where he had earned five years. He could study through the day and at night — this was Mr. Gates' idea — the office would be safer. Folks did say there'd only been one robbery for near twenty years, and that was in the bakery. Nevertheless it pleased the lawyer, and was free. Just down around the corner there was Dave's.

This lawyers' place was of a squatty sort, chucked down inside the Court House square. It was in a corner, near the lawn that bore too many trees for growing grass. The little office was "story-and-a-half" and its wall were clapboards, with a roof which was of shingles that dripped moss. It looked old and had stood much.

The first night, going to his quarters, Johnson found a nickel and a penny on the downstairs floor. The next day he returned them. Some nights later arrived two dimes, carelessly by the door. These also he picked up and laid on the desk of one of the firm. Johnson dwelt in his upstairs room a long, long time; later he found that good Mr. Busby made plans for testing lodgers. There had been two or three boys before who were trustworthy on pennies, but they succumbed to dimes.

It was after the first breakfast at Dave's that Johnson decided to go there for dinner and supper. Two meals at Dave's were better than three. His breakfasts afterward were simple — continental — that he prepared and ate himself. Not that Dave's breakfasts were poor or insufficient, either. His cooking was a

feature, Dave admitted it, and as for hours, you ate his morning meal at any time you liked from six to seven. Dave's table was "dependable" in that you always knew what to expect, precisely. Diet differed from meal to meal, if not from day to day, because in the dinners of every week occurred two porks, three hams, one beef, and a chicken. Suppers dove-tailed, but were cold.

Dave had a waitress with a single thought. She could get exactly one thing for one person, and at one time. Had you but asked her what cereals they had in brew, she would undoubtedly have answered, "Ham and eggs." But that first morning she hovered over Johnson with "Pork chop and fried tomatoes." She gave it as a command, and he said, "Yes."

When she had gone B. Fred Parker, who basked and was happy as the official time-destroyer of the place, volunteered she was often like that. Said she asked him once whether he'd have beefsteak or coffee and when he ordered both, blamed if he got either. If you stayed there, B. Fred said, your appetite was always good. It never caught up with the meals. The woolly tablecloths, fresh weekly, wore service decorations; the napkins, as you got them, suggested other plates and faces; the dishes were not always there in strength or pristine freshness; and the place in many ways deserved what B. Fred said, that it was "cosmopolitan." Dave's eatin' room was tapestried in brown, abetted by two chromos, one fruit, the other fowl.

Johnson had returned on Friday. That night and most of the next he worked at packing, unpacking, and settling, though Crampton helped him some. Saturday night he took dinner, sat on Dave's steps as long as he could, then got to his room. There was a window in the front, *the* window, and there he sat down with a pipe in his hand.

Buggies and carry-alls, infrequent automobiles and many passengers afoot were passing. Spavined wagons paused by the square, where horses were tied while their owners entered the store with produce hauled from the hills; then went on by with many a gay, loud laugh and happy song, for it was Saturday night and "town." That was enough for the red-faced rustic and vigorous maid who shouted out from passing rigs, or ambled arm-in-arm and cheek-to-jowl about the square. As they circulated, youth helped lass by the tip of her muscled elbow across the wheel-tracks of the road and up the kerb upon the other side, urged on the wench that back home could take a couple furrows at a bound and never notice. Varied are uses of business and pleasure. She was the breed that holds her young man's hat when they are out together, but they were happy, certainly.

"And what have they?" thought the man from his window. "They have each other, at least," he might have answered himself, "and what have I?" "You are having experience," his voice replied, and sounded harsh. "Experience — " yes, that was it. Great stuff, too, grand old thing you speak of satisfiedly, some time.

He thought of the woods and the country, with now this little town — all small and alone, as he — and muttered to himself, "If I ever grow rich, and old, I shall live in a place where they don't have loneliness."

Somewhere, off across the square by Gates', there came the silver sound of music. He did not think who brushed the keys, nor as to where the music swelled, now fell, then stopped, or started on.

From his window he reached to hear the poem of the keys. Emotions which had moved him since a little child, unhappily so much, were changing now. *Like the lighthouse by the sea they shifted, high, low,*

now seen by flashes, yet steady-burning always. The stars which were pale, and the moon, which had been sharp and cold, were brighter and grew warm.

He followed it along: it carried him across the land, it led him by a battle, showed him victory; it spoke of far-off cities, life, their pathos, and their joys; he walked in a fair country, and birds sang from the trees that stood along the stream; and when across a world he'd gone it brought him back, and tears stood in his eyes, back to the little house, his home.

But there it spoke of other things, till comradeship seemed rare, and friendship very wonderful but dim; and love, the greatest, seemed as though it would not come. Yet all were in the Heavens. The world was new, and Someone breathed upon it. There was Life. Life spoke and laughed, and wept, when out of the voices and laughter and tears — friendship and hope were born. And they gave Love. Love cradled tenderness — of girl for man and man for girl, nothing apart, together all; the smooth and the rough, the vine and the tree.

He thinks to touch that hand which stirs dreams into life . . . a fierce, re-echoing chord, a softer, fainting sound, and it is gone.

The Court House clock strikes out; one evening spent, alone.

XXII

His day came early. Having prepared and eaten a pick-up Sunday breakfast, Johnson selected from his wardrobe some of the least worn, went down the stairs of his office-home and to the street outside.

Summer sang in the air. The quietness of the

village Sabbath was punctured by the drone of the bees and sharp staccato of the locusts, shrilling from the trees and grass about the square. Birds unnumbered trilled and sang from roofs and lawns and streets, and in the air above. Occasionally a passing buggy-wheel or hoof dropped on a stone — and that was all. Few were about, and he proceeded toward the river.

Down where the smoking stacks of factories lifted dusky fingers toward a fairer sky, he let chance lead. State Street ended and Mill began. Ended also the country mansions with pressed-brick fronts and cut-stone steps, the shaded lawns and homes where all were still asleep, to be replaced by homes without a lawn or trees, or steps of stone or fronts of brick. But in them they were up, awake. He pressed on where the Sweeneys, and the Foleys, and the Mickeluskis lived.

On little porches the lord of the manse sat out in flannel shirt and "galluses," and old house slippers chafed at the heel, drawing contentedly on the stub of a pipe as he tried to be at his fullest ease in the one grand day of seven. Usually he failed, for he shifted his kitchen chair and shook the juice from his pipe impatiently, moving his feet in and out, to and fro, in the faded old foot-gear that covered them. Sometimes he stood up pettishly at behest of a slatternly woman, who occasionally herself appeared to complain of one of the numerous progeny who were up and about, inside and out, pretty much everywhere. The master, biting an oath, thereupon strode awkwardly within. Shortly a cry of a different key announced that he had reached there, with another lesson taught in the practical ways of the plain.

Dirty, smoke-creased curtain-rags flew out of win-

dows or were sucked away as the eddying heat of the factory hollow blew in and through the dense little shacks with hot and filthy breath. It was fresh air. Clothing hung on the rails of the porches, fresh-washed by hand that Sunday morning, already as it dried becoming dusky, grimed again. Here and there a plant, poor starveling thing, showed half-apologetically atop some window-ledge, fighting to live in its small tin can on which the packer's label still persisted. Other cans littered house-backs and fronts, and an uncertain-looking dog or gaunt-framed cat squirmed through the fence of broken, rotting boards that sometimes marked a line from one man's hovel to another.

In one den they ate late, wolfing their food and enjoying it hugely. Queer-looking, unkempt heads were stuck from upper windows and half-clad, rag-bag children were at play among the stones and cans. Johnson heard a dismal-looking harridan say to a man more at his ease upon her steps, "I do *despise* to do this work a-Sunday" as she faithfully and thoroughly discharged a leaking hose upon a little group of innocent children numbering some boys from eight to twelve, also a pair of girls. One escaped, but he was "drug" back kicking by his father. None bothered as to covering, but the common parent sheeted all with water, once at least. Johnson thought back to the Fork — the even simpler sanitation of the "jacks." They had no hose up there. Soap and hot water indeed were worse, far worse, than little soap and some cold water; just look at the poor, and the rich.

There was his own father, come Saturday night, patiently plodding from home to mill, there to run steam into pails of cold water, carrying back his brimming, vapory load before it had a chance to chill. There had been five in his family, and he had made

his pilgrimage that many things. For the Johnsons were high-up among the Romans.

Was that life, or this? Labor had always been his heritage, his "side-kick." Sometimes in going to Fork from school he was wearied of one and despising the other. Such partnerships had little glamour, certainly. They were drab — monotonous — repellent — dirty. Yes this was modern life, if stripped. He had had a long journey with Labor; where would this fellow take him?

He turned at the bank of the river, where the road skirts the stream for a bit before it swerves abruptly to go in a long, wood-sided bridge. He went to the right and up a lane, a sort of offshoot of the street that he had followed down. This alley, he knew, was "Shakespeare Street." He climbed the rutty, rain-scarred hill, by other homes and always of the poor. Ten o'clock struck from the Court House. He walked a little faster.

On the left he passed a shack, meaner even than the rest. A woman sat inside who looked up at his step and showed a pair of dulling eyes. She stitched upon an old, flowered-cambric gown. The road was narrow, and Andy quite close, for she was sitting near her open door. He noticed she was putting in a patch, and also that there had been patches earlier, as there would doubtless after. This one did not match, but neither did the thread. Perhaps her eyes saw no difference.

She was at least very neat, the kind of futile neatness that sets some hearts to aching. A little spool of thread slipped from her lap and rolled his way as he went by. He stooped for it and gave it back. Her face looked sweet, a sort of young-old, ripened sweetness, when she took it, and she thanked him in a thin *but pleasant* voice. His eyes appraised the contents

of the room, and there was little, that little worn and old. He passed by. If he felt the cheer that greater misfortunes bring to ourselves, his heart was tired. He had lived so much.

He hurried along, not stopping again till he came to lower State Street. People were quitting their homes, well-breakfasted, fat-bellied, thankful. A Sabbath peace hung over them. It was the day of the Lord, and it was summer, fine — warm — glorious, and they were going to give praise to Him for all they had, and hoped to have and wished for. The early bells had rung, the lesser laity had even gone. Now chimes in every church were tolled, for the hour was nearing the half, and from the homes of Carpenter and Gates and Turner came well-upholstered folk, some to step out themselves, but more to go by motor to their worship, a square or so away.

Johnson joined the crowds along the walks and since he had no special Sunday preferences turned in with many others at the broadly gaping door of First Church. The ushers were busy with friends who rented pews and he was free to choose his seat. A beldame glared, but he sat down. He watched the parade as it entered and descried a few he knew, though chiefly "in a business way." The Bodeheavers ambled to their customary place well forward. Then there were the Filchers, as also Mr. Busby, with whom he now felt some acquaintance. The Hunters soon marched in and others followed. There were the Gates. He walked with righteous strides. Someone whom he felt was Mrs. Gates came next in their procession, which he observed distinctly from beside a pillar of the choir-loft. At least she walked as though she might be Mrs. Gates. He had never known her at the Fork, but he had known of her for years. And then there came a

strange young woman, rather girl, and mincing just beside her Crampton Moore, room-mate.

This was interesting, indeed; and so was she! She did not look as he had always heard and thought of Holden Gates. Yet that was Barbara, of whom his chum had rambled much in Free Academy days. He had also written, Andy recollected, and had got with joy occasional oblong envelopes addressed in an agreeable though round and unformed hand. She was attractive this morning, a worthy product of the Boston school. Yes, more than that, he thought, reflecting on the high-voiced, robust dames of Slab Fork, large of feet, knobbily red of hand, unkempt of hair and dress, yet no doubt reasonable. The boys he knew back there had grown up, married, and apparently lived satisfactorily with the only kind they knew.

This other girl — he could see just the ends of two rose-colored ribbons that depended from a small, light-straw poke bonnet that appeared by Crampton's head. When standing for hymns he glimpsed a little more, a fair, round neck below the edges of the hat. He almost overlooked the singing that strangers often spoke of, when at home. And when the Reverend Sykes had monotoned through many of the greater sins, and kept his congregation very dry of throat and moist, Andrew foretasted the close.

When it was over he spoke to Crampton, and Crampton very kindly introduced them. And though a product of the Fork, she greeted him most sweetly, since her mother was not there to warn her, having gone ahead. The girl's face, and the girl, now equalled if indeed they did not much eclipse the ends of the small poke bonnet and the throat that had shown beneath. Her casual greeting as she and Crampton spoke and *went along left him well-nigh as dumb and parched as*

Mr. Sykes. He knew he had been a dub. He had *heard* of such girls.

He crossed to Dave's to eat. Dave greeted him ebulliently, and B. Fred paused to pass the time of day, per custom. It was high meal-time, and the scent of good cabbage was rife in the house. Andrew entered the dining-room, and Fred went toward the publican's desk to fill his fountain pen.

XXIII

"Gor any more potatoes, Ma?"

"Yes, George, pass up your plate, there's a little left."

"Don't give me all, Ma! I ain't so very hungry, after all," said the boy, turning on her a pair of eyes that testified much longing nevertheless.

"Oh, I've had plenty, son — you take the rest. And here's a little piece of meat to go along."

"All right, Ma, if you're sure," taking time to answer before he set to work.

George had grown. He was manlier, outwardly altered from the little lad that once had clung to an elder brother's hand and whimpered from the cold.

He was larger and Mrs. Johnson older, far, than even one year before. The boy's face was thin, unusual. It looked weary. The mother's was a little more so. Her hair was greyed.

"I was goin' to get some things up to the store to-day, son, but then I thought I'd try and hang on till the end of the week."

"Sure, we can wait, Ma. I've got ten or eleven dollars coming then, and we'll be right, all right. Course,

there's a few things they'll take out this month, a dollar and a half for Doc, and the insurance, and then I guess there was a little mite left over from the meat bill at the Store last month. We ought to make out somehow. I *know* we can, don't you?" His voice at the last rang a challenge. His mother heard it.

"Yes, Georgie, I know we will, you and me. That ain't what's worryin' me most, I'm thinkin' of our boy down there to Mapleton. He ain't havin' it easy, by a long ways, though we don't ever hear tell. Andy is a *man*, and he always was, George.

"Do you remember, son, the time you was both in the box factory and he was workin' then, though he wasn't ten, and when you come along one day you put out your finger to feel of the cut-off saw and he reached out, quick-like, and grabbed your hand away? And then he sent you home, and when he come along that night we saw as how his hand was kind of tore up 'round the wrist. He wouldn't let on how he got it. Remember?"

"I should say," said the boy, as his eyes filled. "Seems lonely in there now, with Andy gone. I get tired, too, feedin' in strips all day long, never any change, first one strip, then another to follow and one after that, and sometimes I think like I won't ever get to the last. Sometimes at night I'm feeding in strips in my sleep, and wake up. It plagues me a lot."

"I know it, and I'm sorry. I wish I could do it for you. I recollect how Andy'd get home from the mill at night, and set right down here, 'side the fire, tellin' you stories about what-all he did down there that day. He'd try to make it gay-like, and say, 'Oh, it ain't hard. I don't mind it, much,' and even while he was a-tellin' you he'd fall asleep.

"How I wish you didn't have to work and work like

that. Seems like I ain't much good, or else you wouldn't have to. Your father used to tell me, that was long before we married, how he could do most anything, with me. And then things dragged along, year's end to the next, one job after another, till one year, 'twas in the spring, we landed here." Her voice broke. "We couldn't ever get away."

A knock at the shaky pine door and George cried out, "Who's there, you, Jimmy?"

"Sure, George, come ahead out. Ain't you goin' to the Lodge tonight?"

George got to his feet. The table was empty, and he had finished. His mother's eyes were moist, he stopped. "Guess I won't go, Mother. What's the use? 'Twon't matter if I miss, this once."

"No, you go, too. I'm all right now. Come in, Jimmy," she called, going to unlatch the door.

Jimmy came in. He was typical. Down near his nose he had a derby hat and this he tardily removed as he slouched near their kerosene lamp. Long rope-like hair fell over his face and a red, shaved neck rose from the low-collared flannel shirt. His cotton hose were red where they appeared between his shoe-tops and his pants, which bagged.

George was ready, Jimmy shifted to both feet, and they started. The door slammed after, and their heavy-nailed shoes sang out on the pine boards before they reached the sawdust road. Mrs. Johnson started stacking-up. She did not carry things to any kitchen. They were already there.

It was a warm, fine evening after a muggy day and though stars showed above the blackness of the stacks and mill, there was a hint of rain, and thunder, in the air. The ground and all the brush around were dry, so that the Company kept extra watch about the yards

at night. At times like this a little spark, a breath of air — and that was all. Their lumber, though, was fairly well protected for it cost much.

As George and Jimmy passed they met with others.

"Hi, Bill! Fine night tonight. How's the boy?"

"Feeling good, eh?"

"There's Jack! oh, boy! Old woman let you off, eh?"

"How's everything in your corner of the yard?"

"Fine night, ain't it?"

"Looks a lot like rain," and they were at the slab yard, where individuals joined groups, groups merged, and all converged to the Hall of Eureka.

Most of the older members had arrived, and many younger. There was no limit as to age. If boy did man's work, he was one. Old Rogers, George noticed, sat in a corner, hat tipped across his face. He was by no means asleep, as he had only been drinking.

Dispensing with opening forms and ceremonies, the meeting promised more than usual.

The mill had always worked twelve hours. The woods was independent. "It" only worked from "sun to sun." In the winter that averaged ten. In summer it wasn't "straight-time." When it was it meant fourteen, but that wasn't much; "chuck" was good in the Old Man's camps.

Latterly the Fork had heard of factories down in other towns, like Mapleton, where women, men, and children had now but ten hours, straight. In one, some said, it had been cut to nine. The Fork rumbled. Men worked their twelve hours straight 'way back before the Fork had heard of Gates, and later on he "didn't want to get away from any local custom." Gates had cares of his own.

They'd talked about it, pro and con, and off and

on, until the boys had thought they'd have a try and see what they could do. They got in touch with Witzke, who had moved to Mapleton long since for richer fields and troubles green. He returned to them that morning, with another.

At that time there was no such thing as unions in the woods: men came and went, worked as they should, took what they got by way of pay, drank daily and got drunk monthly, had two full holidays a year, and didn't get paid for either. They worked till they were sick from work or cold; then stayed in bed (they had a doctor's fee deducted anyway.) They left their families memories, or debts; and soon were followed by another, quite like the perpetual bull chain that stuffed the stomach of the mill with logs. One day a man got up in meeting — it was early in Eureka's history — and said it wasn't right. Maybe that was "Cosmo" Thorn. Well, come to think of it, "It ain't. Why not do something?" But what to do?

Witzke's partner brought the answer. Cosmo introduced him as an "organizer." His name doesn't matter. The man rose. He was not ill-looking, stoutly built, neatly dressed, more of a thinker than worker. His eyes were deep-placed, shrewd, his mouth was clean and strong. George looked at him and liked him. His voice was very pleasant.

"Friends and brothers, let's get down to business. What do we want? What does *Labor* want? Labor with a big "L," for it *is* large, the Labor that lives and breathes and works and drives the wheels of nations and in turn gets driven. I asked a big man this not long ago. He was a laborer once, like all of us. But he had an idea. He worked hard and never let go of that idea.

"What was his idea, you say? Well, this idea was

that a thousand men working together can get farther and get more for those thousand when they keep together than when they keep apart. So he collected a few of those fellows who lived and worked with him. They talked it over. They hadn't asked anything and they *wouldn't* ask anything but their rights. While they were talking someone squealed to a boss.

"He was an ordinary boss, so he didn't bother to ask questions or look farther than just that. Our man got fired. But he kept on thinking, and he worked. You don't know how he worked! Today he heads the union labor of this State. Up here you may not hear of him, but he's in every town down there below, and mothers tell their sons about him, and what their fathers did with him and through his aid.

"The other day I thought I'd ask him just what Labor wants. And he said, 'I'll tell you, and I'll tell you pretty quick. "What does Labor want?" It wants the earth and the fullness thereof. There is nothing too precious; there is nothing too beautiful, too lofty, too ennobling, unless it is within the scope and comprehension of Labor's wants and Labor's aspirations. It wants, we want, more schoolhouses and less jails; more books and less sweat-shops; more learning and less vice; more justice and less spite; more, in fact, of all the opportunities to cultivate men's better natures, to make manhood more noble, womanhood more beautiful, and childhood more happy and bright. What Labor wants is more, more, more!'

"My friends, what have you got? What would you have? I can see you would have much. But if you would gain much, so must you do much. Are you ready to make your trial, are you willing to test our strength? The time has never been so fair. We *believe that union* — of hand, of heart, of mind, of

work — is the religion of humanity. It was conceived in hope, begotten in charity and born of honor. It was nourished in the milk of strength; swathed in the robes of justice; rocked in the cradle of equality; lighted and warmed by the eternal torch of Liberty. It is the creed of the just mind, the prayer of the generous heart, the commandment of the kindly soul. It is love and love is God. It is fulfilling of his Law."

Great shouts of "Yes! Yes! We are ready! Give us the word!" reached up to the speaker.

In due time the meeting adjourned. Men had taken on a new look and the Lodge was gone, forever. In its place was "United Workers of the Woods and Mill, Eureka No. 1." They framed a greeting to Holden Gates. It was very polite; Thorn saw to that. It was keenly insistent; Witzke did that. It asked a working-day just ten hours long; it did not mention change of pay. They named a messenger and started it away. As their man left the hall the sky was very dark. But a jagged crest of lightning, sharp and red, cut rapidly across the sky and left a sullen after-clap of thunder.

A storm was brewing.

XXIV

A LITTLE group of men had gathered in a back room of the offices of Gates & Vogel, attorneys at the Law. They sat in an atmosphere politico-legal. It was fresh without, so there was little air within, with many reeking stubs and live cigars. One man sat with his feet on a desk, another had his black slouch hat far back upon his head while a long, dead-brown cigar strained but did not stop his speech.

"Gates, I think you're going it all wrong," old

Colonel Hunter interrupted. He was the single one among them who would or could have said it. "If you can't get at their viewpoint and cannot see your way clear to giving in an inch don't, *don't* at all events give them so flat-footed a refusal."

"Well, but, but, d — damn the fellows, anyway. What do they mean by coming at me like this? I'll show them, I'll knock their confounded tom-foolishness and their 'Union' and . . ."

"Easy, easy, Holden," soothed old Tom Sloane, who sat beside him. "Tell me, in so many words, just what they want."

"I can tell you, quick enough. I'd hardly got down to the offices this morning when one of their chaps — Bill Boddfish, too, a fellow I've hired up there, and his father, for years — came in and said, 'Here's something from the boys, Mr. Gates.' 'Well, what is it, Bill?' I said. 'Can't tell ye,' he lied, 'they just said as how I was to hand it in, so here she is.'"

"So I took it and opened it, plain envelope and dirty paper, and there inside, big as life and as presumptuous, damn it . . . Here, I guess I've got it with me."

"Excuse me, Gates," said the Colonel, "but how did you address the bearer of this, ah, message after you had received it?"

"Oh, I took it and after I'd read it maybe half-way through I got sort of hot and started to say something, but this fellow just remarked, cool as you please, 'See it all the way through, please, Mr. Gates,' and without meaning to do as he said I expect I did. Then I told him to get out! And take *that* for an answer, and if he came down on another errand he needn't go back to work for *me*. He had a reply to that, too, just as *if somebody* had put him up to it: 'I wouldn't say "No"'

right off, Mr. Gates. Better think it over good. Week or so'll be time enough.' Confound his damnable impudence."

"Give us your letter, Holden," cut in one whose name was Carpenter and who also kept more than a passing interest in the Fork. "Go ahead, let's hear it."

"This is it, then, as briefly as you want, 'We, the undersigned representatives of the mill and woods workers of Slab Fork, of the company known as the Holden Gates Lumber Co., being herein assembled and organized as "United Workers of the Woods and Mill, Eureka No. 1, Branch of the Confederate Board of Labor," do hereby respectfully but earnestly ask consideration of the following, to wit: That the working-day at present obtaining at the Fork be shortened from twelve hours to ten, pay to be kept the same, believing in light of present conditions that more may be done in the shorter day and that any longer day should not with justice be continued now. Signed by ——.'

"And then, and then! comes the worst impertinence of all, names of men I've had with me for years, and even employed before by ——, er, that I've had with me for years. Spent a little fortune on 'em — Anderson, Hanson, and that fool Thorn, that old fellow Rogers — Rogers! of all, and Joe Mickeluski, why he could hardly sign his name, and yet there you have it with the rest, tailing a typewritten proposition and all. I tell you, it gets right under my skin."

The room was quiet. "I can't understand who started it, anyway. I haven't heard any of this before, didn't dream they'd even thought about it. Why, they've worked twelve hours for twenty years and more before that. What's getting into things, I'd like to know?"

"Just this, Gates," said the Colonel, nicely dusting his cigar with a long forefinger, and resting the fingers of the other hand upon his short, white beard.

"Just this: no man, no one man *is* behind it, and no new thing, no *one* thing, is the cause of it. Time in its roll around upsets the balance of many of our old and habit-honored theories and practices. Men who worked yesterday think today, and you have just been sent a sign. Work, they come to reason, may be the way to livelihood which every man must have, but it should not and shall no longer be the sole accompaniment of living. It is a part of life, undoubtedly, but they are growing to perceive it as only a part and a means to a larger life, rather than its end, its beginning, and the *summa summarum* of it all. Their work is their passport to living. They deserve it, they must have it! but more of its rewards must fill their life. They have not even homes, they say, though that is as much to them as it is to you — and me," he added, looking perhaps to his square old manse at the head of the tree-lined drive.

"In fact, Gates, it may be more. Home roofs that first democracy, the family. And home is all they have. Yet even when they have one, what can they do, they say, but eat and sleep in it, and neither well? They wake and go to work, and when they are at home the time has only come for them to think of work again and to prepare for it. They cannot even hold themselves in cleanliness and health and decency.

"Do not take umbrage, Gates. I only share my observations. I have lived a long time, but recollections of the past have by no means obscured the present and future. No, I think it is clearer, and I begin to see, as you, Gates, will see, as everyone must see, which way *the wind* is veering. Observations are not always

views, but those I offer you are facts. You will do well to pay attention."

"To Hell with labor, then," said Gates, "if they think they've got to have these things to get along. Are they better than their fathers, Colonel?"

"Not better, but wiser. They would be better. You cannot grow a peasantry in an enlightened land. The European immigrant today, sir, is our American citizen tomorrow — or should be. He has used *his* opportunity. We should see ours," — his voice was strong, and his words came clear — "and whether or not we should, then time will show we must. And it will indicate as well that long delays, and disregarding signs, will do no good. It is time in my judgement that Business laid both ears to the ground.

"Tell me, Sloane, and you, Turner, and Gage, can you see what I mean, do you agree with me?"

Y-e-s, to some degree they could. Gates remained skeptical throughout. He saw those fellows wanted just as much for ten hours as for twelve, and as for their performing just as much or more — Pshaw! That *was* impossibility. What they were thinking had little to do with their work; so far as he was concerned, he didn't care whether they thought or not, probably do better if they didn't. *How long they worked*, there was the thing that counted. In his own long-worn ideals *efficiency* was of machines, and jobs, and hours; nothing human about it. Men were shuttles and pawns. You took them, moved them; they stayed put, and they obeyed. Mind and spirit were not of the working-body. He couldn't sense it. His heart was hard but his head was harder. Why should he meet with labor?

The meeting adjourned. It had been a hurried get-together of directors, though Gates of course was

more concerned than any other. The Colonel saw that his words had been mildly effective, but he did not press an advantage. Gates was digesting. All urged moderation on Gates, as president. Perhaps eleven hours would do as well as ten. It was only a few minutes' difference. He could pare the fruit as thin as it would stand. At that, if they didn't like it, what could they do, he wondered? He didn't take stock in their "Union." Sometimes it might work in cities, but it was new in his woods and mills. Of course it would fail.

Leaving, they all passed Andrew. He sat beside the open door but had not dared to leave his work. He tried to concentrate, and saw instead the people of the Fork: so many parts of old and overwrought machines. He had not yet forgotten his own. Independently and quite unknown to him, it was not meant he should.

He need not have worried as to what effect his being there might have, since no one noticed him save Colonel Hunter, who had met him once, and bowed and smiled at Johnson now as though the latter were a gentleman of his acquaintance. Gates stepped to the door as the rest went out.

Barbara just then passed and seeing her father, stopped. Another joined them. He was hunchbacked and old, though his dark grey eye still held a fleck of fire and boldness when he looked your way. The ensemble did not impress one comfortably. He looked dirty, and mean, hideous, and soured on men, and Andrew knew that it was Maugan Grubbs. Grubbs spoke to Gates. Without knowing, Johnson shuddered to see *Quasimodo* remove his soiled felt hat and bow profoundly to the sweet, pure-looking girl.

She did not seem too pleasantly impressed, but her *father smiled* as if he wished it and she acknowledged

Grubbs' attention. All were now some steps away, but Andrew judged she begged her father to excuse her. She then went on and past the square toward home. Andrew saw her until she disappeared beyond the trees, and when his eyes came back he found the men had gone.

Having had supper, Andy on returning to his room experienced restlessness, though not all of this uneasy feeling could probably be laid at David's door to-night. From the conversation of the afternoon and all the long, pent-up emotions left too responsive in the boy, there gnawed a sense of unfitness, an inability to understand these men and probe their minds, an utter helplessness to aid those others back at home who stood in great need, assuredly. Perhaps the view that labor took shot past the mark, extravagant, extreme.

Why should it not? Had any one, unasked, come in the past to help them find the middle road? The present had at last grown cramped, unspeakable. From the height of its Temple the face of age-old privilege leered down.

Below-stairs another struggle of the age and hour was being worried out. Busby, chief clerk, was working over-time. He had come in an hour or so ago. One told by the way the door slammed. He banged away in his swivel chair for a little and then had been forgotten by the boy. A voice reached in an open window,

"Hi! Busby, workin'?"

"Yes, yes, can't you see I am?" came genially.

Lemuel spoke as though he meant it, and some who knew him said he always did. He boasted he "hadn't took a vacation in more'n twenty years"; his wife encouraged him to have one.

"Well, you won't be long, will ye?" in a loud and

undiscouraged voice. "If ye won't, I don't mind waitin', and we can go 'long to the Postal Office together." The speaker was evidently Clem Hodges, an old and patient friend of Busby. Clem was not always an opportunist, being "allus ready to swap the time o' day."

No answer. Busby's pen was scratching. Andrew could almost see his puckery face, wondering whether that darned old client, the widow Hicks, had paid up what she owed and as to how the Deacon Swilletts matter stood.

Clem continued. "'Tain't late yet. Goin' to the Chautauqua, ain't ye?"

A quick, sharp grunt. "No, I *ain't* goin', if you want to know, Clem Hodges. It's too darn pergressive for me."

Silence. Clem passed on.

Andy decided to go down. Busby appeared not to notice him. He was plunged in his desk, head-first. A rather mussy collar showed above a hunched-up back, and he was toiling furiously. His desk, from casters to top, was littered in awful, busy disarray; its center was indescribable. He stated pridefully that he could put his hand on anything inside in fifteen seconds, in the which there was no rival. Papers in front, heaped up above him, sticking from pigeon holes, dropped on the floor — that was "Busy" Busby. There he was and there he had been for a score of years, a little rumpled sparrow of a man. He seemed to be among them, his assistants said, fuming, fretting, grumbling, grunting, even when away. The office-girls both said no one had ever loved him and certainly he had the look of one who lives beyond his mirror. He had never picked a collar just to please one girl, the collar being "*sensible*" of mode and somewhat dusky; his ties

were black, and black; his shirts were puffy of bosom, but smeary and raggly of cuff. He shaved every other day, *and* Sunday. Malice said he wore stove-blackening on his blunt-toed boots, but there is no use to repeat it. Separate hairs of his head, though few, were upright. His hands always looked "used," though certainly he laved them. The cuticle that curved above his opaque nails no longer worried him, no more the truck that underlay their edges. He was interesting, and rather harmless when reduced to paper.

He had heard Andrew descend. When he felt the other had stopped, Busby turned around. He always had a surprised look, not always pleased.

"Good evening, Mr. Busby."

"U-m-m, h-u-m-p, evening! Come to use the 'phone?" The office telephone was paid for monthly, by the call. That was five cents. Mr. Busby was in charge.

"Thanks, Mr. Busby, I don't care to use the 'phone. I am going out."

"Well, fine night. Goo' night."

To linger seemed beside the point. Andy went out. Night-life in Mapleton was gay. The arc-lights flickered brighter from the corners, and there were people in the streets. The town's first annual Chautauqua was well under way. The *Crier* welcomed it, a social event of the season.

Passing hardy spirits who were going, Andrew turned a way that always fascinated him. It looked *big*. It was the stacks and factory-piles of Mapleton. Mapleton just now was industrially busy. It was for the first time. A favorite candidate had been elected by the *people* and confidence — whatever that may be — ran rampant. Full dinner-pails were just ahead;

and so-called vested capital worked hard to turn abnormal times to their account. New factories and old created all day; they ran full-swing by night.

Andrew came to one. Dense clouds of smoke were bellying from it; sparks joined them and were lost to sight; a roar went up inside, and broke away so that he heard the rasp of saw and drill and all the piercing voices of the mill. It ran like mad. The chug of its engines, the cries of its men — great human emmets in its iron-crust ed bowels; the black fumes of its stacks; the tang of its breath upon the face; its products rushing from the yards; the prints of its work upon the earth and all the sooty, coal-grimed land around cried wildly to the tranquil sky above in all its screeching littleness. It seemed to call out — “Money! Men! And Money! Give us more!”

The first mill was planted in an echoing, smoke-choked hollow which was stifling-full of rising heat in summer. About the first one there stood others. If they stopped, you heard the engines draw their breath, champing, panting, gaining steam and strength to try again. Men came and went, in morning or at night, six days in every week. Some came seven.

As Johnson neared the last a quiet came. Something in the iron vitals of the mill had given way and work was stopped. Men left their benches, put down their noisily insistent drills and dropped their hammers for a spell. Firemen laid down their shovels on the concrete floors and left their furnace-maws. The doors and windows filled. Their dirty-colored clothes and crowding bodies showed dull-black before the swinging incandescent lamps inside. One or two among them lighted stumpy pipes or fished out half-smoked stubs from overalls and jumpers. Hard laughter and coarser *words came over the sudden stillness; some stepped outside and lay upon the ground.*

A puff or two, a little rest, and then a short, shrill whistle blew. Back, back they thronged again. The noise began as if it never stopped and never would, darker smoke-masses shot up and out the chimneys, and all was life and action. The hands were at their lathes and drills and tables, thinking much of midnight and a lunch. *Minds* worked with *hands*. One day some would speed up, thought Johnson, as he left the valley of industry and climbed to the hill-top of quiet.

XXV

IN the dusk of a cool November afternoon, Andrew sat in his corner of the little office, half home, half working-place. The days had been full, but this was drawing to a close. He relaxed. He sat as near at ease as one approached inside an office planned exclusively with work in mind.

The town was giving signs of consciousness. It was not yet awake, yet something stirred. Ask a passer-by, he could not tell you when it started; inquire of the workman and he was at a loss; seek out the man of business, possibly to hear that things were "sort of restless." The bank could add that money was flowing freely. Restlessness, perhaps that *was* it. To Andrew it occurred at times that Mapleton had just turned over; awake, still drowsy, reclining on an elbow with filmy opening eye, it meditated whether to rise or fall asleep again. Johnson took the better view, and called it good.

Yes, there was life, life even from the small-paned window where he sat. An old woman, a handkerchief across her faded hair, an empty basket on her arm,

went shuffling past; the Rev. Sykes came from an opposite direction, frock-coated, stalking erect in the way of the Lord; children free of school went romping past, a lame news-seller had the *Crier*, out today; a democrat jolted over the stones, shook with the ruts, and stopped close by to hitch the lean-flanked mare beside the park; occasionally a business man or idle woman strolled along; a heavy limousine, compact, voluptuous, rolled by; and a wandering beggar from the hills asked alms of the few who came and generally passed. Within the hour a creaking ox-cart, wooden-wheeled, lurched heavily along the road, a well-heeled farmer cantered by upon a small bay mule.

Something brought him back. The something was old Busby's letting fall a paper-weight upon the floor. Old Busby, then, was dropped as someone passed the window. In the dull smokiness of the autumn day Andrew saw that it was Barbara. "Miss Gates," he would have said. He thought of her as he chose. More than a hundred feet of road, two sidewalks and some rows of trees and lawn and shrubbery had kept them separated; she lived on "the other side of the street." He did not meet her often and talked to her much less, occasionally at church and sometimes on the street. She always spoke, and it puzzled him, since many others in the town had never seen him since their introduction. He was a nobody and none had even noticed that.

He'd been a little hurt at first. Back there, up in his woods and hills, if you once knew a man or woman then you knew him, no mistake. You might be Bill the sawyer, Jake the cut-off man or Sandy Hanson's boy, it didn't count. He was not born some banker's son nor yet a close-clipped dancing man. His father *had not worn a linen collar.*

And yet with Barbara it never seemed so, queer that it should not. They were about as far apart as a free-trader and a good old-time protectionist who had inherited his views. It was a far cry indeed from old man Johnson's pine-board cottage to the brick-front dwelling of the sharp-shod business man.

Andrew chose to fancy to himself that, half a chance, it might be different. So now in passing when Barbara, just by some happy chance, looked in the small, dark office window she nodded quickly and went by. Andrew wondered if she saw him answer, as she hurried on along the park, turned at the crossing toward her home and was at last lost to him in the dusk of the evening and the shade of her father's trees. If she hadn't, though, much difference it would make.

Faugh! this poverty, and constant work, with little irritations and the petty smallness of it all — it sickened him. How could he ring in a change, walking when he would ride, plodding where one should fly, and so slowly. Hard work and its handmaiden poverty — why did they always go together? The night when he stood by the mill, the day when he walked near the homes of the poor, the years when he lived in the shack still poorer, what had he felt toward them? Pity, at first self-pity perhaps, then sympathy too, and a longing, strong, latent, fierce, to help them up.

A sight of Barbara; their misery and long-emaciated happiness give way to nearly all disgust. He had seen too much of that other. He had been in it, of it, it had always been himself. To get away, to forget, to lose those sights and sounds and morbidness, forever!

How many times it happened.

A letter from his mother — it all comes back, the feelings of a moment gone, clean-swept away, and he is

of them: relief for all their humble suffering; some happiness displacing misery; a clearer gaze for ignorance; a living for existence; a nobleness for degradation; brave independence for servility; the greater love for personal greed; fulness for starvation; rest for the weary and strength for the weak; honest manhood for the man; ripe womanhood for *her*; a childhood for the child.

It was so far, from the low-built tortuous trail to the wide highway at the top. Where was the middle ground — the trail marked "Justice"?

THE MARKET-PLACE

XXVI

A FEW years spun off on the road of Millennium, and though the goal rests so much nearer, the end of the journey still lies more than the space of a day's journey beyond. Mapleton and the Fork draw nearer, though much rough road yet runs between. The bridge of Understanding is under way but hardly more than its superstructure is laid. Between lie many openings; and the ends of the framework, shot out from each side, are resting on air; for they are not yet joined.

When Holden Gates had ended his directors' meeting on that day he was not empty-hearted, though his emotions or the better self that dwells in every man were not too violently disturbed. We should not know Gates and say that.

Gates was Business, the Small Business of yesterday running the Big Business of today; still, however, Business. It was Business to keep the men on hand; keep the crop of the mill full; its paunch packed; the hands and belly working. He had no problem of mental anemia or any sort of psychological mal-treatment. Oh, no; it seemed an aggravated form of industrial indisposition, or indigestion possibly. Time perhaps might prescribe. For the present the only remedy seemed a graceless giving-in to some of their demands. Actually they had required but the shorter day. Potentially there were other threats and rumors

of threats. Of course he had not gone up to the Fork. The men asked ten; he said twelve. He yielded up eleven hours. They took their wages. Another time and he would be more fortunate.

Poor Gates! The next few years played merry havoc with his theories and heavy-headed notions. Johnson, though Gates did not notice, made progress with his law. So did Gates' daughter with her cost-plus schools. The girl was almost through her last successful coat of finishing. It was on, and drying. The problem now was — college years or coming-out? Gates talked of one, his wife espoused the other. Barbara, strangely, favored neither, but had not said so yet.

Regarding Johnson, he had chosen coming-out. College was too expensive to be interesting. A few good lawyers and a drove of poor ones had got along without it. He elected law at once. He was mature enough and showed that when he took his bar examinations, early-winter of the third year. He even passed. Having studied Gates' methods meantime, he saw no reason why he should not try a hand at practice with him. Invited, he stayed.

One time, it happened on a Christmas, a miracle struck Andrew. It followed an experiment. A plain got-up young man had visited Gates' house. He did not enter behind a card. He did however ask for Barbara, and oddly was admitted. Despite her mother Barbara had very nearly whom she chose. Gates was independent, notoriously so. His wife was not subordinate. Barbara borrowed of both. Her parents offered him an armed acceptance, though no very warm one.

However, they were well established within the *inner sanctum*. They might afford, you know, to have

occasionally a plain young man around the house. This one was that, indeed. His clothes were not the type for which you read the magazines. He was young, yet of the hills, where the young are old and the old die young; and no one is ever much older than that. His manner was plain as his origin. Barbara confided once to Becky Young, her chum at school, that he was not so plain, at all. Sometimes to her he fairly shone; she considered him a man. The confidence was given soon after that first Christmas, and she had since had ample opportunity to change her predilections as she wished. A new note found the heart of Barbara, and stayed to fascinate.

She loved the Christmas in the country. She never gave it up. Her mother always talked of Boston or pictured Broadway in its splendid spenders' glow. Her father added nothing. "Christmas!" — what was it? He still had his work. It meant a small turkey to each man-jack and householder — mock the term! — who dwelt within the Fork, a Christmas turkey more by way of compensation for a past than promise for a future. It brought a fur set to his wife, perhaps another car, a badly needed necklace; just the purchase of real gifts for an immaterial "I thank you." Surely if Christmas owned a different meaning once it must have been because it was the first-made anniversary of spending, of wasting on a single day the pelf you worked so hard to gain on many others. "Christmas?" — bah!

So he had his *Christmas Spirit*, too, the only kind he had ever known since his own mother upon a far-back day had tucked some nuts, red apples, perhaps a scarce, new quarter, into the stocking of a boy. The boy had smiled and kissed her. The day, it had been wonderful.

Yet when the time had come for Barbara to go away he looked ahead to see her coming back. Cynical, rough-made, giver of hard knocks, taker of few, glorifying his own desires while he discounted others', he, this and more, turned with relief to his daughter, turned as a close-fisted and unrighteous man slips off the habit of a week-day to don with sure relief a mantle, good and generous, for Sunday. His lack made her more precious; and he knew it.

Wherein Gates rose above his wife. His wife had once liked him, and she bore a great love for herself, but she only petted her daughter. She was a dear child, but when children are born you must nurse them; and when they grow you must care for them; and you must educate them, to see that they thread life well-dressed, ornate of body and as well made-up as possible of mind, but not too well; they must be properly brought out; finally, well-married! and you — brave wife — are free.

But do not judge her crossly, just a modern woman-type, coarse goods but tailor-made. She did not see his love of the girl that had been come forth to rest again on the girl she had borne him. She lived very well without him, poor old dear. She rarely envied her daughter and fancied in the mouths of everyone, "Lovely girl! But there — how like her mother." Barbara saw only a mother. She did not, like a suitor, anticipate the day that they would be as one. It was no certainty indeed, though the mold of Emma Gates was cast before the day of Rome. Barbara also respected her father as the just and righteous donor of all good and useful gifts. She regarded him peculiarly. She was the one in a world that loved him, for she lived nearest and she knew him least. If *mother* submitted to father in terms of a glorified

check-book, the pity due must vary with your heart. She only felt toward Holden Gates what Gates showed toward the world, *his* world. It was made for him, and he would suck the measure dry.

Which leads a far way from Christmas, and Barbara. The girl had loved the day, more than ever since it was her coming home. It brought white trees and glass-flecked lawns, ice-bridged, beautiful streams, and strong, chill gusts from the frosty old Man of the North, blasts that chunked you under the chin and watered your eyes, colored your cheek and poured a rich, good sauce upon your appetite. It pleased the palate and made an active, virile body where there was rich, good food to tickle one and a plenty of warm-fashioned things to trick the other.

Barbara was home. Andrew's body and soul were nearer to meeting than they had ever been before, his mother and George were not much closer the harder things if they were not farther from easy. His years of study by good right of perseverance and thin living drew near their close and he no longer worried, much. *She had come for Christmas.* The cutters that followed fresh, eager horses over the white-packed streets of the town trailed bells that were never nearer to silver; hale, stout-made farmers and their families came, bought and took away; the denizens of a growing place of industries worked hard and made merry as the time drew near and passed. *He was to see her often.* The rich shopped hard by day. The poor owned little stores by night and spent their cents like dollars. The church of the Reverend Sykes had a tree with poor candy for poorer children; and small, pert snow-birds cried their way about the white-laid streets, finding a few grains here and a morsel there, chirping aloud in happiness, lauding the god of Waste. He wondered

what she thought of him. Respecting the Christmas of Johnson, Gates gave to each one at his office a present — cash — in honor of Gates' New Year. Four ample seasons had passed. His enterprises did well. His mill was at capacity. Prices had soared at his store. *Sometime he would find out.*

Their third Christmas season had come. The first — when he had made that call — was very pleasant. She gave him an amber-stemmed briar on the second, as also "happy returns," which he liked. This year he had a gift for her, that lyric "Dream Life." It was sweet and he fancied the suggestion.

Fair friends, they seldom met outside her home. He rarely had time for parties, and often needed clothes and invitations. It is so awkward lacking either.

That made no noticeable difference. He saw her often, and now she knew she was glad when he came. He met the evening train on this return, and had a minute's chat before her mother whisked her away by motor.

The night before Christmas belonged to him by right of might and their preference. Hattie had gone, and was forgotten by two-thirds of that family. Quite opportunely pleasure called the elder Gates away and they had answered. By every token and creed their daughter's place was with them. Conversely, she sat with Andrew in the rosy glow of a fire of cannel coal.

He had brought his book of dreams and she of course had opened it. She liked it and he was good enough to indicate some favorite passages. Their heads got close together, with their minds and hearts. There is an equality in fire-light. Man's hand goes out to man, and it is good. Dollar-piles shrink and imagery is favorable and fair. She was only a daughter of men, *and he a strong man among them.*

"Tell me," he said, "why are your letters always exactly alike? You might have them mimeographed. They would certainly do as well for Karl Vogel as for me, and I am sure the Reverend Sykes would find them strictly proper."

"How about your own, then? I'm sure I've often thought of sharing them with lots of girls at school."

"Ah, that's hardly fair, is it, Barbara? You know —"

"I know very little indeed about you, young man."

"Possibly, and that is just as well. I am a very common sort of animal, as anyone can see, and you should be well satisfied indeed at being spared the telling of my beads. I have any amount of cardinal sins, and the greatest of these is ambition."

"Oh, that's too bad," sighed Barbara, "I don't think I believe in that, much. Just think of what it's done to *lots* of splendid people. I wouldn't want to mention father, he's such a dear, you know. But look at Mr. Busby. I'm sure he's very ambitious."

"Yes, after the way of moles perhaps. I am very much afraid, though, he sees ambition and progress as a never-ending array of perfectly balancing ledgers, self-shining shoes, or likely some Eldorado where pencil-points break not and typewriters never run down."

"I should say that's rather mean of you. He's *very* faithful."

"And I suppose that I am faithless. Were I less so I probably should be feeding some machine tonight, up at the Fork, earning my dozen cents per hour and thinking of my piece of bread-and-cheese at twelve. I should have stuck to my last."

"Oh, I never think that!" cried the girl with real contrition. "Please, oh, please, do not speak of that Fork again. I never realized what it meant to so

many, and I am afraid I never want to. It seems so horrible, like some Gargantua that never gets enough."

"Well, isn't it?"

"I don't know. I never used to think so. I remember I just loved to go there when I was a very little girl. It looked so big, and fine, and busy."

"Yes, it is busy," he replied.

"Sometimes father would drive up and let us go along. I was always wild to, but mamma seldom liked it. Said it made her have bad dreams."

"I shouldn't wonder," Andrew offered. "Do you know, it sometimes makes me feel that way, really?"

"I'm afraid that you are adding irony to other learning. One Fourth, though, I do remember. Father promised to take us up to the Lake the day before. You know, that pretty lake just north of Slab Fork? The roads were terrible, of course, but we *made* mamma go, and Hattie, and actually had an awfully good time. We spent the night up there. There was a dance at one of the cottages, but I was too little to appreciate it. After lunch the next day we started back, and stopped for half an hour at the Fork so father could see a foreman about something he said was terribly important. I don't suppose it was, but while he was talking with this man, mamma and Hattie and I stepped out of the car for a little stroll. The walking was horribly bad, and I remember I got my nice new little slippers quite full of sawdust. Your roads are very poor," she smiled. "But don't interrupt, I haven't finished."

"The rest all wanted to climb back in the car, but I was as stubborn and mean as I am now, and they were afraid to let me go ahead alone. I remember there was ever so much noise around the mill, and men shouting, but we hardly saw anyone there. Oh, yes, we

had one visitor, a little boy who came and stared. He was so *queer*! I'm sure I'd never seen anything like him. I wanted to speak to him, to see if he could talk, but mother called to me to mend my pace. Now why are you smiling?"

"That was your first real admirer, Barbara. The *queer* little boy was I."

She blushed very rosily and prettily.

He went on. "That was the very first time I saw you, or anyone like you. You were as strange to me. I thought I had seen an angel. And I've never been sure that I didn't."

There was lunch, but nobody ate it.

"Have you known all the time that it was I?"

He nodded, "Yes, I have never forgotten. You made a great impression on that day. The boy remembered for the man. It was the first time I ever saw you. When was the second, can you tell?"

"Yes, indeed," she said, "it was that morning at the church, so very long ago. And I remember, too, how sorry I really felt for you when Crampton told me you had to dine at Mr. Dave's."

"I think I merited your sympathy, certainly, and I am glad to have it, even late. I never mentioned our first meeting to you, even after I knew. I'm not sure that I have ever had so good a chance before tonight. And then again I wanted to bury my past. I thought that possibly you might in time learn to associate me with Mapleton, and lawyers' offices and well-bred poverty."

"I don't think that's very kind, Andrew. You ought to know that I think *more* of you for what you've done, and what you are going to do. To you, probably, I am only a silly, very young girl, just from school with everything to learn — though you certainly ought to

know better. Probably I have *not* had many opportunities to really live and know. I have learned, though, a very great deal from you and I intend to learn more for myself. Do you think I can. Am I so absolutely hopeless, after all?"

Andrew for the most part had been smoking, and thinking, but he could not resist this appeal. He thought to pass it off jokingly.

"It would never do for me to tell you *what* I think. I am the hopeless one, I fancy. I often do think, though, how everything might have been changed if it had all been different, my home, my education, my life, my hopes and prospects but mostly I myself."

She regarded him seriously. "Surely, Andy, you don't think that it could make a difference? Why —" and she stopped.

The man's face flushed, for the back-wash of those starving years was strong.

He started to speak — paused — and got no farther. The girl leaned impulsively toward him, a perfect offering. There were sympathy and understanding in her eyes, and more, as they met his.

He saw far back in them, and was unafraid.

Later, very late, they realized that the elder Gates must come some time. These would not care to find *anyone* sampling their hospitality at that hour. Andrew shook himself, and said that he would go.

He did not resist another word.

"Just think, dear Barbara, you are so wonderful, *everything*, with everything. It seems so strange; for I — am nothing."

"Hush, you must not say that to me," whispered the girl, drawing nearer. "If I am satisfied — can't you be too?"

Barbara drew his head down, pressed it close against

her breast. She placed a little hand that was velvet-soft and very sweet across his lips.

Christmas morning Andrew left for Slab Fork.

He never spent the day in Mapleton, even this, his day-of-days. The few who had been left him beside the River's fork up there called silently. He always went, took what he could, and returned with their love. It was his mother's day.

It was the day all Slab Fork was itself: some men and women.

XXVII

At the beginning of that year Barbara declared firmly but quite nicely to her father that after the close of the next spring's term she was not going back. Having talked the matter over with the young woman's mother, it was allowed to lapse. She added nothing as to plans; they had agreed it was not best to, yet.

At the end of the last school year Barbara came home. She stayed there quietly perhaps a week. One day — it was Thursday — she appeared at breakfast announcing she thought it would be nice to run up to the Fork that day or the next. It being breakfast her father was about to rush to the attack at once, but on looking at his daughter decided to postpone it, which spoke quite highly for his daughter. In common with good men his early hours were worst, as if sour dreams had given him some shaking-up by night.

At breakfast — without reason — he thought "No!" and was as anxious to cry aloud and say it; at lunch he would consider; at dinner he calmly announced an

acceptance, quite as though he had intended all along to give his orders to the logging train conductor, one John Williams, to have the long-unused frame dwelling of the owner put in proper order by that Saturday. Barbara wisely decided to wait, since her plans at first were sketchy in that she had not made up her mind just what to do with herself once at the Fork, in the event she had gone alone. The whole of it was Andrew rather more than sociology, although she was coming to think.

So early Friday morning old Mother Minsky, following arrival of the train, had picked her a broom and a pan, stirred up the heavy time-thrown dirt of the cottage with one and partially carried it off with the other.

On Saturday the Gates had risen at a frightful hour and made their train with something of a retinue. No machine could hold them. The women were even a little late since poor old Williams would never dare to leave without them.

By eight o'clock they were driven from the Station to the Store, thence to the local summer home, in Pete's honest, well-intentioned democrat. Barbara thought it was pretty good sport to be cavorting across the ruts and into the pools of sawdust, first on one wheel, then on another, and Mrs. Gates vouchsafed a mild though still sincere "Impossible!" Arriving at the cottage Mrs. Gates sank down upon a chair, Mr. Gates strode over to the mill immediately, and Barbara was glad to look upon the town. The Mapleton house staff meantime followed Mother Minsky inside, looking for a clean spot as their nucleus for preparation.

The town was new to Barbara, and she to it. She had heard enough to bias her quite well about it, certainly. *In limine* of the rarest and ripest of feminine

jewels, a logically reasoning mind, she was nothing of the kind and her childhood impressions were merely piqued through knowing Johnson. When he had come, there was interest. Her trip, so suddenly announced, had followed up an entertaining conversation they had had some evenings previous. He told her of the Fork.

The next day being Sunday in the world outside, at the Fork the day in seven where most work ceased and whistles did not blow, Barbara came to know better the folk of her man's first being. She thought maturely, though how and why from her poor expensive opportunities only the Great Giver of Blessings himself could ever have told you.

While she peered at them through the searching glass of sympathy and the wistfulness of not quite understanding, Johnson sat at the window which looked upon the Court House square from the drab, uncarpeted abode of the fortunate lawyer-clerk.

He had heard from her, a letter sent him on the day she left and postmarked "Mapleton." She omitted to tell him where she had gone, but it was very sweet and at the end — "yours most sincerely." He wasn't satisfied.

He was asking himself what she might see in them — his people. But when he wrote it was not of this, for love has no business with questions.

His letter grew; it sounds very foolish now.

"A week ago . . . and you and I sat side-by-side in church. You were attending to the service, probably; and I was listening, perhaps.

"At the same time I could not help but feel the myriad pulses of my heart, many voices with one song; nor keep from stealing now

and then a glance at you, *my love*, so close — with Miss Convention in between.

"I wonder if another week will bring us back again as we were then? I miss you. I miss you more than you can know, I think. My heart cries out for you. I am alone.

"I have a love of pictures. One of my very best is *you*, a week ago. We were together then, in body, spirit, but now we live uncounted miles, a thousand years, apart. And very many days. What failures letters are!

"You know I love you, dearest, dearest girl. I starve for want of you. I love you far away — but better here."

Johnson re-read the letter and laid it away in his dresser.

A few mornings later Barbara rose with the song-birds that came and laughed about the window where she slept. She looked from the window: the river, where the long day's smoke did not yet rest, was very fair; the flowers looked at the sun and trees bent to the wind. Sweet air enwrapped her with fragrance of days that are new.

She left their house, and glimpsed from a hill the smoke of the train from the town below. As she stood there, watching, a step sounded by her side; and when she turned, it was Johnson.

Together they walked a little way, and knew that they were glad.

"I could not help it, Barbara. I had to come! And your letter . . . There was so little of it, dear. You are not displeased? I needed to get away, somehow. Of course I've taken no vacation. Put my day's trip *down to that* if it would please you more."

"Oh, Andrew, I . . . Why! Let's walk over there, along that little path. Wouldn't you like to? And we can talk."

They started where a grassy footpath led crookedly away and through a tiny meadow. The trail lay smooth and brown, and all about it was the field decked out with ripe blue-bottle flowers; it turned and twisted, crossed a little stream of noisy voice and pebbled bed, went up and past a green-topped hill and to the remnant of a forest. Where spice and smoke-bush met in a green-leaved tangle, and the little clubbed arms of the crow's-foot reached out at the base of the trees, they found a seat close by a crumbling, cast-down pine.

"And to find you here! Barbara, it seems impossible. What could have made you come? The place seems such an odd, poor setting for you; here where my own people live, and sweat, and starve; here where yours —"

"Don't, Andy, I can't bear it. Did you ask me why I came? I came because I wanted to know, wanted to hear, wanted to see with my sight — myself — just a few of the things you have told."

"And you have, Barbara?"

"Yes, indeed, a hundred times as much as I needed to know that all you said of it was true. I didn't believe, I couldn't, that my world had held a place like this so many years.

"The afternoon, that day I came, was very rainy. It was wet and cold, for summer. Even the people seemed to drip and droop as they went about their work in a sort of sad, half-hearted fashion as if they only followed the way of their fathers — and could not help it for themselves.

"Andy, boy, it reminded me of a home I once saw when I was a little girl. It was very beautiful; in it

lived the blind. Next it stood one for lovely old ladies, and men; it was hideous. Flowers crowded the doors of the sightless, and where the old ones lived paint peeled from walls, the lawns were bare with dying grass and rotting leaves.

"The woods here are as lovely, and empty, as the poor little town below is horrible, and maybe empty too. And the people, Andy . . . If I had been that same little girl, I should have stopped one of them as he was walking by and said, 'Can you be *real*?'"

"No one knew me at first, I think, and — but are you listening? It doesn't tire you?" she asked, with wistful eyes. The bloom of the girl was at its full, and Johnson loved her.

"Dear child, how could it? My people are I, and I am they. Tell me more of myself."

"Well, then, no one knew who I was, at first, for I hadn't been here since I was small, oh, very small. So I stopped some of them and made them talk to me."

"Which wasn't very difficult, I think," added the other.

"You musn't interrupt. I stopped a few of them, children, and some poor old women too. And I said, 'Why do you live here?' and 'Are you happy?' They didn't *know*! though one or two of the children said in their queer little voices, 'I dunno, it's 'cause my folks is here and most like always has been.' Even the older ones couldn't say much more. But one old lady told me, when I asked her if she were really happy, or what, said 'Gawd, Miss, I ain't got feelin's. I'm only a poor old woman who thinks as how she's lucky with wood in her stove-box and a little cold chuck on her table.' She was terrible, too, with a wart on her chin. I didn't have the heart to ask so very many more.

"But there was one old gentleman I met, and he

talked with me. He was different from the others, for *he* stopped *me*. He took off his hat with the oddest old grace you ever saw, and said 'Excuse me, Miss, but I haven't seen your like for so long I couldn't help speakin'. You ain't offended?'

"Of course I said no, so we visited a little while. I asked him some about himself and then I spoke of Daddy as 'Mr. Gates,' and do you know, the old man swore, most dreadfully. It seemed to be about my Father, too, my Father! Why do you suppose he did that, Andy?"

"Why, why, I suppose it was because" — the man fumbled — "why, I suppose the reason was, he may have lost his job or something through him."

"I don't think so, for he said he was working, and had been, for years, and he added 'Probably I'll keep on working, nothing else, till that old cuss, or else me, dies. Workin' for nothing, too, when once I could a' bought him for a song.'

"Of course I asked him what he meant, but he wouldn't say anything more, except, 'Perhaps you might be kin of *Mr. Gates*?' I tried to avoid that, and pretty soon he went along, after taking his hat off in the same way again. He did look so forlorn, as if his wife were dead or something and he lived alone. His face was very rough and beardy. Just think, perhaps he hadn't even a razor."

"Yes, and think, too," said the boy, "of Karl Vogel, the razor without a beard. Which is tragedy?"

"Please don't joke. He looked so sad. Who *could* it have been?"

"Indeed I don't joke, dear, except to keep up spirits. I'm serious enough inside. It was probably the 'Admirable.' Queer old duck, nice to me too when I was a boy, one of my earliest teachers.

"His name — the 'Admirable?' I believe it is rather much mooted whether he was sometime dubbed so more for the character still left him, or the weaving, sailor-like gait you may have noticed. Etymology is loose up here.

"The old man has a history, but very few can know it and they don't seem to tell. Perhaps it's just as well."

"Perhaps," responded the girl, without knowing.

"But ah, Barbara, it cuts me to the bone sometimes, this . . . this life, this Fork! It's part of *me*, my mother and my father, blood of my heart, flesh of my body — and I can't even rip it out if I would. And it is very sore. I wonder, 'Who's to blame for all this misery and smallness, and this little, narrow-rutted life?' Often I think, 'They *could* help themselves if they would.' They never have, but they could indeed and by Heaven, I think some day they will!"

His voice rang out so strongly, then choked away, that the girl turned eager eyes to see. His eyes were moist.

"How incomplete it all is here — men always to work, and slave, and keep on serving; and maybe even try to *love*. The woman's part, I take it, is to give of her life and meantime utter thanks for what she gets — down there." He looked toward the hive below.

"I wonder sometimes when their hire is due."

Her mood was pleased to change. She rallied him upon his ebbing spirits, at first without success.

"What chance have I," he said, "*of* this place, *from* this place, to really get away? Where can it lead? To live life, to want *all things* and get them! to grow up fast and big enough to reach your . . ."

"Andy — do you believe in fairy stories?"

"Sometimes, or I used to. But no good fairy ever *led me* to the Land of Enchantment over the Highway

of Happy Endings. Till I knew you I lost my confidence in them."

"Well, this 'fairy' then will tell you a story. My old Hattie, when I was a really small girl, used to tell them to *me*. She told me one of a Poor Young Man. I want to tell you that — sometime. But this is one of my very own. You take my hand, the way old Hattie used to do. And don't be cross if I forget or have to stop.

"Now *this* is The Story of the Vine That Never Quite Reached to the Top.

"One day, oh, thousands of years ago, there was a small, weak seed. It was so small no one had ever noticed it. It was so weak it couldn't even get away from home, alone. So it moped in a corner where it fell from the lap of the Mother Vine, and said 'It's just my luck. Here I fall from a nice high place up where my mother lived down to this small, damp hole, and no one is ever going to help me get away or to disport myself the way I'd like to.'

"But just as he spoke a lucky wind came blowing its way along, and even before the little seed-chap could make up his mind whether it was really good or ill, whether to go or whether to stay, or whether it might even be his chance, it picked him up in spite of himself and carried him off, far from the damp, low hole, all over the land and sea to an old brick tower that rose from a hill in a glorious foreign land.

"It set him down there quite as quickly as it had swept him from the old-home spot, and whistled away no doubt to look for another small chap. He was still dissatisfied. He looked this way and he peered that, and he listened, till he didn't see and he couldn't hear the faintest sign of another good-luck breeze. He didn't have a *thing* to help him, so by-and-by, he

was so disgruntled and unhappy, he thought he'd see if he couldn't do a little something all by himself.

"He stuck two tiny, rooty feet 'way down in the earth where he lay and raising his neck high-up in the air, he stretched. Real hard, he had to stretch, but he found that after he had done his best he could just reach up to the first low brick of the tower. 'Here,' he said, 'is a place to stand, to get my start.'

"The first few bricks after all were not so hard as they looked. He tried one, then another. Up a few inches, then a few feet, he rose by degrees in the air. He passed low vines and the small, short grasses, waving and laughing and jeering at *them* as *he* went along toward the top.

"But as he went he found the easy going got a little harder. He kept looking down to the ground and thought how hard he would drop; the wind was edging around him, trying to make him fall; other vines, still higher, were trying some of them to choke him off. For though there was room for him as well, *they* wanted it all themselves and nobody craved a crowd. He started to whimper, and even got ready to fall.

"When the sun came out and gave a warm, encouraging look his way, it seemed to say, 'Be up and doing, son. Forget the feet below. Get right along to the top.' So he called back, 'All right'; and started once more. Most of the others he passed, the long hard climb seemed now a little way. A new view appeared as he rose; the few hard places below were lost to sight and soon forgotten. He sang as he worked and stretched and grew. His world below and all about was getting very fair.

"Just then a cloud came up. It wasn't a big cloud, either, but from where he rested beside the tower, *within* his own small place, it looked so big and dark

he suddenly lost courage. He glanced for a moment above. There was room at the top, indeed. It had not been far when the hours were bright, but in the lonely darkness and the cold it seemed hard days away.

"'With a little sunshine I might have made it,' he cried, as he looked far down, saw the far way that he would have to drop, and let his fingers slip.

"And when he was all crumpled at the bottom, bent as he fell, the long months' framework smashed to little pieces, the sun came out. It was warm and very bright. The long rays, glancing downward, spoke, 'Only a little farther, we could have said to you. But you were weak, and could not grow alone.' 'Yes, I was weak,' he answered; and the little vine, down once more where it started, fell back where it lay, and died."

"'Only a little farther,' dear . . ."

That evening, just before the logging train slid downhill to the town, she left her hands in his for just the moment that she said,

"Andy, *I believe* in you."

He returned to his fight.

XXVIII

It was very early. Andrew clumped down the twisting little staircase of the office, and emerging at the foot came close to felling Mr. Busby, who had just at that moment entered and was dumping hat and coat upon a hook behind the door.

"Good-morning, Mr. Busby."

"Grumph!"

When Andrew had been a student his activities were somewhat under the wing of Busby, who was part

clerk and the remainder man. Busby no longer interfered so very strongly with him, having a newer apprentice and two girl stenographers or "lady secretaries."

"Been havin' a vacation, huh?"

"I have, for a day."

"You couldn't 'a' been back sooner? We're powerful busy now, and the partners got a mighty sight to do. Here's some memorandums they handed me to give you yesterday."

Andrew followed Busby to his desk.

"Umph! Smoke, don't you?"

"Yes, sometimes."

"Umph! So do I." Mr. Busby took one thin, black stogie from his desk, put it between his rather mossy teeth, then lighted it. Tobacco stench blended with breath and Andrew turned away. Mr. Busby opened some other drawers, closed one or two of them and let the others go. He fumbled around.

He was one of the good old type which, thanks to Heaven, will follow the bison and passenger pigeon. Modern efficiency kills them off, these men-clogs. Busby was as he was. Chautauquas failed to move him. He was hopeless.

Having got confusion out of chaos, Mr. Busby's long dark finger presently alighted on the papers, entombed in the stogie drawer. He had written them himself: the first words were finely printed; a line of less neat writing; then the rest in dots and dashes scrambled up with periods and comma-marks. Both active partners were absent. A case, a very minor one, had come while Johnson was away. A woodsman had been "taken in" on Sunday night, in town. They said he was drunk. He claimed he had been freezing, coming *down from the camps*, and had taken a nip for warmth.

It was not an important case. The fellow was poor, the fee wouldn't be much. Meantime he was snug in jail.

"Let Johnson practice on him," said Gates the day before. As Busby finished, the secretaries burst in. They were sisters and local products.

"Good morning, Mr. Busby," they caroled.

"Late, eh?" He censored tardiness and never noticed overtime.

Having rushed to a mirror and sauntered to a desk, the elder took her place beside the mail-tray while her sister started filing. Mr. Busby left his own *débris* to delve into the mail, began a letter, then remembered something. He left one sister for the other, looked at the work she was filing and mumbled,

"Haven't you finished that yet? Here, here's something else I want you to do," gave her some pencils to sharpen and a will to copy, and rushed back, where he picked up another letter. The telephone ringing, the secretary stopped her work to reach for the instrument, which graced a pile of notebooks, pads and office riffraff. Mr. Busby's pose was critical as Miss Meander said, "Call for Mr. Johnson, from the Fork."

Mr. Johnson left his desk, there being only one connection.

"Hello. Hello. What!

"You are?

"Why, that is wonderful.

"What? Nothing's the matter. I'm talking from the office.

"Yes. I don't know whether I can. You want me to? You *do*? I know I shouldn't. Well, that will make me then. Yes, I will. You may count on it. Tomorrow night. Thank you. Good-by."

All had been said within hearing and sight of our

small, appreciative group, including the boy, one Calvin. Mr. Busby was perhaps more impatient as he tried to dictate and catch the drift, while his dictated-to did her best under conditions so provoking.

"Oh, excuse me, Mr. Busby, just a minute. That reminds me, Mr. Johnson, someone called you up from there day before yesterday. Miss —, let's see, what *was* her name, or was it a Mr. Somebody? They called you up about five, no, I guess it was after, to say . . . Well! I've forgotten just what they said. They called up, anyway. I told them you weren't in."

"Thank you, Miss Lucy."

"Miss Meander, if you're positive you're ready, just take this . . ."

The stenographer stiffened perceptibly, patting her hair where it rose in front. Correspondence at last being done to a turn and to as much apparent satisfaction as Mr. Busby ever evinced, he looked a little farther in the basket, hurriedly picked out a small white form with the name of a bank at the top and an over-draft toward the bottom, muttered, but loudly enough for Miss Lucy to hear,

"Huh, that doggone account run out a'ready? Put in something just last week." Mr. Busby was a family man.

The young lady felt in a desk drawer, groped among a handkerchief, a handbag, a scrap of sewing and some miscellany, and opened her mouth again.

"Mr. Busby, if you go down town, we need some new supplies."

"How's that? What's that? What's your list for this time?"

"Well, we're out of ink for the stamp-pads and I need a new typewriter ribbon, and —"

"I should think, Miss Lucy, you c'd boil the old typewriter ribbon to get the ink. Lots of good stuff left in it. Read the other day of something of the kind. Thought 'twas pretty good. Better try it. Got to have more efficiency, or something.

"What else is there? No stamps again, eh? Well! what's become of 'em? *Used 'em*, eh? I'll have to start some checkin' up, I guess. 'Spose I c'n get 'em if I have to."

He gripped his hat, swept up some papers from his desk and rushed headlong out of the door. He got in a small, black car outside, the legal conveyance which everyone used and nobody cared for. Calvin cranked, and returning to the office found breathing easier. Johnson was endeavoring to pick some moldy precedents from books and a modicum of information from Busby's impossible notes. The ladies worked *so hard*, they often stated, that when no one but they were there — that is, neither the firm nor "that old Busby," "Mr. Johnson only worked there," like themselves, — they had to stop! They must rest. They did.

"Helène, where in the world is that brief of old Mr. Bennett's?" It was Lucy speaking.

"Oh, sister! I don't know. Don't bother me, anyway; I was just thinking of that Mr. Pichet we met last night over at the Jones'. Wasn't that *horribly* homely girl with him his sister? I sh'd think so. He's an 'it,' but how he waltzes. And his eyes, believe me . . ."

"I don't want to hear about his eyes. I just hate men this morning. And I'm simply *burning up* in this stuffy old office. I think I have a fever. Go see how warm it is."

Helène obligingly catapulted her letters into the file, and dropping Mr. Pichet consulted the ther-

mometer. Coming back she picked up everything again, averring as she did so that "the thermometer says only 68."

"Well, I don't care if it *does*. Oh, my dear, there's something wrong with me. I'm hot. I can't work, I'm tired. I always am, when I have to take that old, nasty Busby's dictation. Ugh!"

"There now, you poor child. Don't try to do any more till he gets back. You're all tired out. I don't see how you can stand it."

"What, the dancing?"

"No, you dear stupid, all this work. You ought not to *have* to do it."

"No, we shouldn't. Both of us should have at least a month's vacation, too. I'd just go to bed and stay there, except maybe evenings. Most *stenographers* can probably stand it, but you know, sister . . ."

"Are you going over to Madeleine Scrubbs' party to-night? They have the sweetest new Victrola. It looks as if I were going to have a very busy week. I saw Madeleine's sister this morning; you know, the one that didn't marry. My dear, you couldn't count the wrinkles in her face. Well . . ."

"Walter asked me. I think he's sweet, don't you, Hélène? He has a flat nose, but lots of money. I do wish though he'd cut off that horrid little black moustache. It's — well, you know . . ."

"Here, try some of this gum I just got. It's a new flavor, 'spruce-mint.' One of the boys had some at the Post Office this morning. I kept mine. Smell? Umm! it's good. Are you going to have that *crêpe-de-chine* this fall?"

"I'm going to have that, or a new muslin with scalloped edging and two-thirds sleeves. I'm tired of *these dull old things*. I'm going to bead mine and make

it look like one of those fifteen-dollar waists. *Aren't* they wearin' 'em full this fall?"

"I guess so. Do you want that brief now? I suppose *dear* old Busby's about due back."

"Never mind, sister, I guess we won't need it till tomorrow anyway. Let's get a drink of water."

"Can you see what time it is?" looking toward the Court House. "I feel as if I'd been here days already."

"Only *ten o'clock?*"

"Oh, dear. I don't see how the time *can* drag when we're so busy. My, I'm anxious to get through this noon. Mother'll scream when she sees that yellow ribbon on the waist Carrie sent me this morning. It certainly is chick."

"Sister, do stop drumming on your teeth with your pencil. You're such a cut-up."

The new lawyer hung on, and tried to do some catch-as-catch-can thinking. As Mr. Bodeheaver once said, "They *were* right chatty." Johnson envied Calvin. Just now the boy was buried in a bursting romance of the early West, a nobly hell-fire place where good stenographers were barred . . . where Mapleton was not . . . he harked to Faro Nell.

Further intercourse was ended by the returning Busby, who left his car with a leap and re-entered the place on the bound. He tendered to Miss Lucy a full half-dozen pen-points, all assorted, three pads of varying size but one pale yellow color, an "All-Wear" type-writer ribbon, part of a bargain in pencils, and a bottle "of cheap but standard ink" as he himself assured her.

"Here's all of the work, Mr. Busby."

"Umph, a' right."

One "umph!" for thank you, two "umphs!" at good-night; rarely an "umph!" for good-morning.

He was of them that are never born young. Yet Andrew was sometimes glad to see the little, futile man, and now with undinned ears he bent again in a noise of hammered typewriter keys and freshly slamming files to proving to a visionary magistrate just what a chilly man might take and still retain his dignity.

By evening he had dug out several precedents. He supped at Dave's and came directly back. It was one of his earliest cases and quite as unimportant from an able lawyer's angle. Things were always meagre enough, assignments of "poor cases" from the Judge, a pick-up here, a hard knot there. If there were work to do, why not the sort that carried credit?

Come, this was plain enough and he would drive his own stakes well. He closed a volume of Common Law and lowered the top of his desk. Even Busby had left. He switched off the light. He felt like bed; and sometimes when he got up there and before he dropped to sleep, he allowed himself to think that all would be as well if he did not wake up. He was weak tonight, and empty. Dave's meal had long since been assimilated.

He left the office and crossed to a little grocery. It was late for Mapleton, but in the corner store a shaded kerosene lamp beamed appetizingly on canned preserves and colorful boxes of crackers. A little old lady in black popped suddenly out of a corner where she had been knitting and dozing.

"Good evening, Mr. Johnson! What's your pleasure tonight? And how are you these pleasant days, for they *are* pleasant, aren't they, and I said to Jonathan only yesterday, 'My! Jonathan, how the time flies, and how my days get happier just all the time.' Sometimes I get to wishing it wouldn't go so fast—but then I *think that that* ain't right. We're all here for some

good purpose, but when our time's run out, why we'll just have to go along and leave our niche for someone else who'll be better and happier maybe. Least that's what I tell Jonathan, and he thinks just as I do, too. It makes me glad.

"But how are you tonight, sir? Seems like you're kind of quiet."

"Just a little fagged-out, Mrs. Sumner. Things never seem to break too well, and now and then I find myself a trifle lonely in my little 'world'."

"Poor boy, I'd think you would. But it won't last. I used to tell Jonathan when our boy Joe was sick and the store wasn't starting to pay, and I not so very strong, either, not least as I am now, 'Keep sweet, Jonathan, and let's be as happy as we can. Surely this won't last forever. I know the Sun is there, though it may be hid for awhile. Things are bound to take a better turn—you see!' and somehow, they always did.

"Here, take some of these fresh little crackers that just came in today. *Don't* they look brown and nice? Just as if the baker'd only had 'em in his oven not a quarter of an hour ago. This cheese is good. My! Just like cream."

So ran on Mrs. Sumner, with no right to be so happy. Andrew went home. He had confidence in tomorrow.

XXIX

SUNLIGHT streamed in the office-room. Johnson sprang from bed as the little clock warned him of morning. It was his day.

He splashed himself with water fresh and chilled from the September hills, and shaved and partially clad

leaned head and shoulders from the open window. The sun's rays fell across his face, and a rising breeze with woods and autumn in it waved the fading leaves outside. Between the bending trees and twisted branches of the little park he saw the Court House, could even read the faint, time-blurred inscription, "Hamlin County, 1859," so deeply cut above its door. Dew stood upon the balcony in front, where sunlight fell.

"Right there, my boy," he thought, "you get today another try. Pick out a strangle-hold, and hang on hard!"

He ducked his head from the window, eager to dress and be gone. Hurrying out of the office Johnson turned toward Dave's and breakfast, for he had prospered to the point where he no longer served his own. He did not notice now how poor Dave's was.

Breakfast was ready, unchanged. He bolted from here to the office, found a letter indicating that Barbara must have come home the night before, sat down and studied once more. Shortly before ten he picked up his books and papers, walked through the trees to the Court House and entered the great front door. It was early; the benches in the park were scarcely filled.

Threading the dark corridor and going up the winding stairs that led to the "chambers," he had his client pointed out by an attendant. The prisoner was of the woodsman genus, unclean and shaggy from habit or force, extra-unkempt from jail. He had just been brought up for the lawyer. The man was not at ease, and did not look around till Johnson laid a hand upon his shoulder. At the friendly touch he started, then turned a shamefaced countenance. The liquor's red was somewhat yellowed by two bad nights *in jail*.

Johnson took a good look, and placed him as a workman of the Fork, Pete Swanson. He had been a sober chap, a man of some family and perforce a steady worker in the mill. Pete looked sick but gradually perked up.

His story was easily told. He had come to Mapleton two nights before, "the wife bane sick." Their "doctor" was off in the woods. A horse was bad and he was needed. Pete was an ignorant fellow, but even to him his partner seemed ill. Larrabie finally allowed him to forfeit work and pay for a night and go to Mapleton for drugs. "Be back tomorrow, though!" he warned, and that was two mornings ago.

The air from the woods was cold and damp as the logger slid down to town, and a wandering "jack" from the hills had fished out a flask from his hip. After a comfortable drain he proffered the remnants to Pete. Woods invitations to the cup are not delivered to be declined. Pete, chilled and worried much, gave in. The bottle was of noble size. As glow succeeded chill, so cold soon followed liquor. More fuel was fed to their engines. Pete was in poor training. He hardly knew when they got to town; much less was he aware of any doctor's habitat. In a bad moment he inquired, but of a local officer who hung about to see the trains come in. Stray drunks quite often arrived by that route and constables were paid per piece. So Pete paid toll.

Judge Flexner came in. Several visitors had also entered in the meantime, though Andrew failed to notice them particularly. Pete's case was called and witnesses appeared. He had been *bad*. The officer made it clear. Swanson was sworn and haltingly confirmed it. It looked as though his wife might not need medicine were it to come by him.

Johnson faced the Judge. His knees trembled well with his voice, which lacked assurance at the first. Certain of something to say, he shortly made easier progress.

"Your Honor, I should like to add a little before you pass upon this case.

"The man was drunk. There is no doubt of that. To argue it would be beside the point, as I am very ready to admit. But there is some extenuation. I know him, and I know why he fell down.

"He is not used to it. More, I do not think that he has ever used it when at home. Unaccustomed, he was a very easy mark, I do not doubt.

"That he has kept without it in the woods is pointed evidence. I was born there. It is a place of hard work and strong liquor, and the men — if ever such a thing were justified — are certainly entitled to *anything* that will lighten, even so little, their load of abominable living. I do not advocate it, though I can myself excuse it to a great extent. Its use no doubt may aggravate conditions, but indeed it seems to help sometimes. Drink in the morning and drink at night may be a cause, or a result. I myself can witness that, confronted by conditions wholly foreign to most, this man has nevertheless lived *right* and according to plainer lights than his.

"He left a wife up there, weak, sick, suffering. He left her with small children. The only doctor was gone, perhaps for days. Futile no doubt as it was, this man came down here to get help. Whether the need for it may still exist I do not know. Neither does the husband of the woman nor the father of her children."

Pete followed all in part, the last he fully understood. He bent his tired face, his clumsy shoulders shook.

"If he returns, your Honor, now, he *may* get back his

job. Should he be kept it will not help a lesson I promise you that Pete has learned already. He may arrive in time to help his wife. He was mistaken, certainly, but at a time of physical discomfort and a little-understood anxiety. I should also like to be his surety that he will not come back. I move he be discharged."

Pete gazed up at the Magistrate with his awkward, miserable face. The Judge looked back, yawned, blew his nose, and grunted, "Case dismissed! The next!"

Johnson sat down beside the late prisoner. He wrote him a note to Larrabie, found him reduced in money and gave him something from a purse so unpretending that he noticed there was not enough for even this week's reckoning with Dave. Pete would have refused and his face reddened again, but Johnson rose, told him the way to the doctor's, bade him good luck and walked part way to the door with him. Some people were crowded about the entrance, where the two stopped.

Pete mumbled out that he would not forget, saw that the money was still in his pocket, seized Andrew's hand, and hurriedly left amid laughter. No one doubted his going home.

Johnson looked about. He saw several factory hands he knew, probably now on the night shift. There was one whom Johnson recognized as a local organizer, a leader and honest friend of the people. This chap, Hal Jenkins, came up and shook his hand, introduced him to the others and chatted for a moment. There was quite a little crowd, and all congratulated him.

"Well done, boy," said Jenkins. "You got him off fine, but you won't never get rich off'n fellows like him or us, will ye?"

Another said, "How'll you spend your fee?" while a

third added, "Don't mind 'em, son, you ain't no poorer. Like as not you may be better off some day. Plenty as takes poor cases as if they has to. You take a-hold as if you *wanted* to."

"Yes," cut in Jenkins, "that's about how things stack up with me, too, Johnson. Wait a bit and you'll land yet. So long, boys, I gotta be goin'."

"So long, Hal," they called to him, and gradually their crowd passed out.

They had formed a little ring, and Andrew had had his eye on Jenkins. But now he heard a slight cough to one side. It was Barbara.

"You!" he started to say, and noticed Karl Vogel. Karl turned a pair of easy-going eyes and a little trig moustache upon him with, "Ah, coming up in the world, old man?"

He went a little way along, as if to hurry Barbara. She stopped by Johnson for a moment.

"Andrew, you're going with me tonight, *aren't you?* You must!"

And when he had accepted, but not as if he must — "Indeed, that was a very splendid thing you did just now. I heard what the man said afterward, too, 'Just wait a bit, and you'll land yet.' You will, you will, I know it!

"That poor man, too. One of Papa's, wasn't he? So awful and discouraged, he made my heart ache. He told me of the Fork, all through."

"That *is* the Fork," said Andrew, as they left the Court House.

XXX

A BLARE of drum and bell, the swish of skirts, the busy emptiness of talk — it is a dance.

Hereby be it known to all to whom these greetings may come that Mapleton was in possession of a Country Club. It was really a Club and it was actually in the country. Mapleton a few years since had writ herself down a partial-progressive. The spirit was sweeping on East from the West, and a little live spark had caught. First it had added a factory or two, then raised itself a fresh-air club.

It was the regular "Saturday night."

The Club from its piece of hill flashed winking eyes about the country. Its grounds sparkled with the lamps of the *nouveau riche* in motor, and those less brilliant of the *vieux pauvre*, in carriage. The Club had a large membership and what goes with it.

One motor larger than the rest purred up the drive to its crest, and let the occupants descend. They were two, and they were Barbara and Johnson. Together they mounted the steps of the Club, she in the dull expectant glow of many evenings, he walking to his first and in attire far ways from second-nature. She was animated, very, and he looked flushed and happy. The music burst upon them as they topped the steps; he thought that it was good.

"Excuse me just a moment, will you, dear?" said Barbara, and she was off to where a little company was streaming in and issuing out, wrap-laden or not much clad. He followed the men to a corner and bartered his coat and hat for an oblong of numbered brass. He looked at his hair, if you will know, and also straightened his tie. He must not be late, and when he had returned his partner did not come for several minutes. There were people he knew, but few knew him.

Then she stood by him, young, lovely, rich with life. There was a hand on his arm and a voice at his side,

and she had come back before he knew. He looked and caught his breath. She was a revelation, according to the fashions.

When she said, "Do you like it — my gown?" he looked at her and saw a glorious neck, white, rounding arms, soft hair like ravelled silk and framed by it a most bewitching face rose-flushed with joy. So he said, "Of course I do, dear child."

She looked up pleased; she was only a girl.

"'Child,' indeed," she answered. "Come," as a waltz was wafted in, "we can't waste any of this."

So they went in and through it all he wished that his accomplishments were not so *useful*. Her dancing was a song, and his was new. Others came up to break his dances, and there were different girls, so cordial now since he had come with her — "their queen" he sentimentalized as now and then he glimpsed her on the floor. He wondered if he liked it all as she spun by in others' arms, held tightly usually.

Since he was now *all right* he danced with several girls she introduced, and all frisked well and most of them were interesting, tonight. It was an early taste. After a time he tired. He walked through one of the tall French windows, to a gallery that circled the hall. It presented down below a multitude of dimming lights. It captured the voices of woods and the river, with up above the stars and a thin wedge of moon high-mounted in the heaven.

He turned, and looked at dancers. What a company, indeed. He, even, saw that. Figures and faces were finely limned by the lights above and behind. The girls, how attractive, as flimsily overpowering as fashion and good mothers might achieve. He saw a woman who did not seem jealous; she was looking at her daughter. A person skipped into view. He was

small, his face indulged a light, stiff-waxed moustache, and on his wrist was strapped a little band of gold. It was so delicate and held a pretty watch. He was a splendid dancer, and most popular. "Bah," thought Johnson, "'not even food for the saw.'" Johnson wished that he were not a *man*; but only for a moment. He was finding a perspective. He glanced at certain girls again — Bernadette Dennis, Hermione Iris Smith, and even Carribel Chubb. Their people had grabbed money within this generation. They had been to school, poor dears, but they had never *graduated*. They had a kind of wonderful clothes and were comfortably covered with jewels. Their partners were either too young or too old but all had a good time. Andrew judged them by Barbara. The Dennises and Smiths, perhaps, were hardly wealthy enough. He thought of his stiff old-fashioned ideals: of man in the market-place of the world and a woman in his home. Why, that was just where they must never be! He mused of Barbara's ideal man, so often painted for him. He laughed. He used to fancy it was he!

Andrew had not seen her now for several dances. Under the gallery was a terrace that ran the length of the Club and near the terrace were tables. He had thought he caught her voice in a lull between the dances, so he re-entered the room and went on down to the garden. There seemed to be some drinking here and many had refreshments of their choice. It was dark, but now and then he recognized a face as he made toward the end. Out, safely off from the crowd and the dancers, he stumbled past a table where Mr. Bodeheaver supped with a friend. Mr. Bodeheaver was slightly tipsy, but asseverated stoutly that "in the spirit of Nathan Yale, 'I would rather be tight than be President.' A little more bermuth, waiter!"

He kept along and heard a voice, coarse, loud, proceeding from around a clump of shrubbery. A chap was saying, "And I tell you, too, the man is so far behind the woman of today — except for cigars — that when he takes her hand she is already tasting their first kiss.

"But *I* don't care, I'm sure, I don't care at all. Women aren't worrying me. Maybe you lose one now and again. 'Take heart,' say I, 'the Lord will quickly provide.' There's always too many more."

There followed a muffled "Oh!" another voice. Andrew cleared the hedge. A man, he saw it was Karl Vogel, had wrapped an arm about a girl who sat quite near. On the table were glasses, one empty, one partly filled. Andrew noticed as he came.

"Come on, take it, take it," Vogel went on, "'ll do you good." He shoved the glass at the girl, then ventured further intimacy.

Johnson did not talk. This was a girl, he was a man and here a chap who was no longer one. He rushed in, caught Vogel by the shoulders and dropped him on the ground. His chair fell. The half-full glass balanced uncertainly, then spilled on the man beneath. Andrew stepped to the girl, who had covered her face with her hands. It happened to be Barbara.

Vogel was still on the ground. Johnson clenched a fist, but the girl raised her head, saw him, and caught his hand in both of hers.

"Take me home, Andrew, please take me home. I've had enough." Her voice trembled, and Andrew took her arm. He smelled the faint aroma of the liquor that had been before them. His heart throbbed and his brain worked angrily, but he did not advise. Few young persons care to learn by proxy. He noted *with relief* that no others were about. Probably,

though, it would not have mattered. He ached all over and did not feel like talking. He had little cultivation, so excuse him.

Barbara felt of her hair, and they went into the Club. The music had stopped. It was twelve. Some yawning men and more polite women were all that was left of the dance. They got into their wraps. The door man called for her motor. It was the same summer loveliness as when they came.

At the Gates' Andrew spoke awkwardly to thank her for his evening. She waited a moment, looked close in his face. "Good-night," and she was gone.

He went to his little room on the other side of the street. Dreams, when they came, were made of Barbara and Vogel, of Mr. Bodeheaver, and of a dainty watch worn at the wrist.

XXXI

Now once upon a time — in the sweet old fashion of things that weren't or things that ought never to be — came a new country. Because that also was new and made pleasant sounds in the ear, they called it "America." From small it grew great; and from new, old, till it seemed its out-croppings and off-shootings would never cease.

So to keep affairs at anchor and see that all did not shoot up too great or suddenly, the ancestors devised a plan for choking tendencies. They made a Congress. The head of this body they termed a Senate — "of venerable, distinguished men." As for the feet, one called them Representatives, the latter meant, oddly enough, to represent a people. It was their very own play-ground of legislative reference. If ever old

populi's sons grew too excessively playful the Senate was there, like any good Queen, to promptly "off with their heads." And for a while it worked, and many lost their heads.

In more than one community there was an over-store of politicians. All right, then, send the Boys to Congress. I need a better landing back of my summer-house, you have just skads of poor, abandoned land the very thing for cantonments. I shall allow the Government to dredge my little creek, and you of course won't mind one mite in case good Uncle Sam longs for the hummocks of your fields to pitch his soldiers' tents or feed the good thick weeds to army horses. It's a cinch! Off with all coats and vests, and get your favorite son along to Congress.

We pack 'em off to Washington, and then they do the rest. In time I find a harbor by my home; you see your pasture-field go white with tents a month a summer (and just as fat for cows at other times). If you are good you may with reason count on turnip-seed in packs; if you are *very* good, perhaps some plum.

Sometimes a Boy got home. He came cheek-full of tales, with a prolonged cigar or maybe whiskers done in plaits, and usually he'd saved enough to live the ripened measure of his days with reminiscing. It was a fulsome life, and none who'd played the game could see himself why proletariat should not tip hats and cheer.

Yet gradually came discontent anent the Head and Feet of Congress. Some didn't get all they ought; the back-yard creeks gave out; or squash-seed didn't last. One couldn't do much to the head, though, it being over-high for everyman to reach. They started to stamp at the feet. Youngsters, or dodderers with clay-stems in their mouths, threw seeds in fires and said,

"Oh, Hell! Why don't those fools do something for the *country*? By gosh, let's send a man!" Once in an age they did, but little House of Representatives' face could not be doused all clean at once.

A new clean race was starting to be born. Real changes nevertheless come slow where all men have their say, and so it was reasonable that even in September of the good year nineteen sixteen Holden Gates should be the alleged chosen of Mapleton's electorate for the lower House of Congress.

The last man had died on the job. It being incumbent to pick out a new one they hit upon Gates in informal convention. He had not worked for it, no indeed, Vogel gave them to understand that. In fact, it was required of the latter to sound his partner out, to see if he would even *take* the nomination. It seems he would, so hastily they offered and slowly and reluctantly—but very firmly—he accepted it. It was the blood offering of the Old Watch to a man they knew would carry on their spirit to the letter, not ruining a home-town or a district for some old country's sake. The delegates had been congratulated heartily by Vogel. All of which the *Crier* duly chronicled, "a splendid, unexpected tribute to our able fellow-townsmen." Of course, the bare fact was that Gates himself had labored toward this very thing more weeks than there are months in the year.

The Congressional district enclosing Mapleton joined up three loosely-settled counties. Hamlin, smallest, was the key. Since the others rarely agreed themselves and always failed to patch a peace, fruits of the fight most often rested with the least of them. So it was this time. Gates' party held the first conference, and after customary deadlock he was the outcome. At the last he was preferred unanimously, being

nominated with loud acclaim and much triumphant burning of the Hon. Holden's own cigars, distributed one to a man.

Gates was a splendid figure in those days, puff-cheeked, and prosperous and proud. To those of worth he was a fine antithesis of rabblerrout and mussy mobs. His hands were clean, his soul was whitewashed. His nomination was accepted comfortably by others like himself; was swallowed patiently by those of the middle-class who long since ceased to ripple in the pond of politics; and kicked up quite a furore in ye populace, so that the last were quite as solid as the first.

The former uttered, "Well, this only shows that the country *will* be safe. You take no chances with good men like Holden Gates. You know just what to expect. Now if such-and-such a 'fire-brand' had been chosen . . .";

The in-betweens, "As good as the next most like. We needn't expect anything anyway";

But the last, "We'll be hanged if we see another one like that go in. Look at Gates! Look at the Fork! Ain't they enough for you?"

They should really have been ashamed of themselves. Mr. Bodeheaver said so himself when he had heard them talking on the corner. Nevertheless they did not seem to be, but confidently jangled their dinner-buckets on the streets and talked quite freely as they met. Labor had much on its mind. It looked as if it had the bit well in its teeth at last, and was plunging ahead — to what?

Shortly a second get-together came, the other party. It encouraged slight interest and no concern to that of Gates, for the latter's nomination was election. Already people spoke to Mrs. "Holden" of the perfervid

life of the Capital, as fathers retailed to her husband of likely sons they owned, with clerical ability. Gates selected a larger cigar, delivery November first, and they agreed that Barbara should not return to school. Mrs. Gates ordered hats.

There was opposed to Gates a very different type. He was *good*, in letters of gold, one W. Makepeace Jenny, a favorite of Mannheim County. As Gates' constituents felt safe in keeping company with politicians, so had these others trusted to a pacifist. It was a new, unnecessary word. Bodeheaver reckoned *it came from the West*. The candidate cleared up their doubts and brought a long interpretation with him. The dictionary had made of him an "advocate of peace," but no one looked to him to fight for it. Old Gates' adherents laughed.

There wasn't much variety so far in platforms. Gates embodied the Grand Old Tissues; Makepeace had fetched some others, furbished up to look like new. Well-to-do hugged stomachs ecstatically, men frowned and thinkers shuddered.

Then at the darkest hour over the skyline of the American politician rose a flare. It shot a spot-light on the face of thread-bare, subsidized issue; it showed the new, not the old; it had life.

Nobody says who touched this spark to light, but in a second-breath it flashed in speaking characters a quick, tense message: "No man's labor is commodity. It is a free-born part of life, *his* life." Some closed their eyes from choice and breathed, "Impossible."

But others sobbed "Thank God!" and looked again. They saw men *living*, no longer but by bread alone, yet filling out good days more as the Maker might have fashioned. Soul-smashing toil was not the end, nor means, nor only termination of their road, for in-be-

tween were happiness and homes and little children. Nor did the working day take all, with at its close, "Prepare thou now again! For the morrow is already at hand."

Here was The Chance. Strong gates of great, dark shops were burst apart and from the dust and foulness there trooped forth a flock of puny figures, drooping as they left the heat or cold, pale as they came to meet their sun. Where, like flowers, they warmed to life.

The hour of the sunrise was due.

XXXII

WITHOUT two things you would not notice Maugan Grubbs: his back wore a hump; his nose set off a mole, large, ugly. Both had been there a long time. His disposition, which you could not plumb but guessed, was badly warped, yes, cankered. Deformed, he did not relish comeliness. Broken-backed, he got more than attention. He attracted votes, which was well, as that was precisely what they kept him for. He worked on the poor, for the rich. He certainly hated the rich, but the poor had nothing to give. Votes were the wares of his trade.

He was a strange old fellow, and cutting as a knife. Like all good hunchbacks he owned a single passion. Vogel and Gates knew. Ask, and they would tell you it was Vogel and Gates, oh, yes, and politics. Quiz him, and he would tender you a squint-eyed look that served you well for all your trouble. Also, he would not tell you but would leave you all a-shiver from his queer, quick glance. Though strange and repulsive enough, you say, he often jounced a baby when the father held *a vote*.

This was Grubbs' day, and with the passing of September work began. He went at things with relish born of some success and much experience. He circulated everywhere among the poor, fomenting grudges here, healing another there; narrating for the next a chance to grab a dollar; reminding chaps of cash long overdue to powers both knew; cheap cigars, ranker arguments, a beer or two, a bit of money slipped to cautious hands by one yet more so. It was old-womanish, but why shelve it while it worked?

And for a while your voter paid the compliment of showing them this valuation was all right. He lighted their stogies and rode to the polls. Generally he walked back. He always forgot, however, when the carriage came again.

Two old parties and one old method: same result. Grubbs' mind was keen. With his peculiar cripple-energies — and they were not a few — he centered on his new campaign. His eye, however, had grown dim.

Often he worked through the women. There were stories, and men Grubbs avoided, but mothers didn't vote. As Vogel and Gates often said, he got results. "Confound it, that's what you're for!" they used to tell him. "We don't care how you *do* it. Don't draw us in, that's all." They gave him what he said he needed, didn't ask a very strict account, saw that his work was good and took fair care of him.

It was a tough triumvirate. Vogel was the people; he always nominated Holden Gates. Mr. Gates represented his firm; and Grubbs delivered the popular vote. To date it had never failed. Gates was prominent, Vogel was prosperous, and Grubbs, the universally despised, still worked.

This year Grubbs set his mind to try a *coup*. That Jenny fellow, with his peaceful propaganda, was dis-

turbing votes a bit. Why not ring in the Fork? That was Gates', wasn't it? Gates was dubious. Whatever else, he was a business man and partly knew *his* Fork. Vogel was enthusiastic. He added his word to Grubbs', and the latter went up there. He was gone a day and a night, came back and said it would "go, big!" They were dead, didn't care how they voted, bring them in. Of course the hunkies mostly were not citizens. But they were certainly good, usable units. Out of hand it was decided. Gates gave them all a half-hour off one day in late September, a round of drinks and they were registered — right. The State's Attorney, pressed for his opinion, said certainly he would not mind their being brought to Mapleton the night before, allowed to vote and then sent home. The people's prosecutor was a party man. He was also on Gates' ticket, this time for re-election. Gates sent word to Larrabie, declared holiday *with pay* all of Election Day, and sat back in his office. He had paid them money well-nigh a score of years. He recollected all they owed to him and felt they knew it too.

About the time that Holden Gates tipped back in his swivel chair, said to Vogel, "Hermann, it's under our hats. We've got 'em cinched," and bit the end off a fresh cigar, a little crowd of blowzy men built up a fat-pine fire in a sooted sheet-iron heater. The Workers of the Woods met here. Those present edged some frayed splint chairs and nail-trimmed boxes a little closer to the stove, bit hard on sour old pipes and got to work. They were not strangers, and they pooled a fund of experience acquired in lives and years of the Fork, also something of brains that both had not entirely dispelled.

They were ripe for a change. You could visage it in *the old Admirable* as he fidgeted around; you could feel

it all in Witzke's nervousness; there was more evidence in the clasping and unfolding of Thorn's hands; it was borne in to you by the eager, quizing eyes of Boddfish, as he sat back hard in his wooden chair, examining the others as he drew on his pipe and now and then cursed between teeth when he took the fuming briar from his mouth. Pete of the station buckboard was there and the other Pete, he of the escapades; and two or three more who do not matter, as they were simply audience. They were listening to the Admirable.

The Admirable looked mad. When he talked you were quite sure he was mad. Refined, his remarks consisted of denunciation.

"Godalmighty, as if it wan't enough to own this place and run it like a shambles, he takes this running-start for Congress, most like to get a few reforms — for them as doesn't need 'em — and then he gets us ready to help him out with it. Has anybody voted since Hector was a pup, or half a chance to do it either? Let him as has say so."

No one spoke.

"And now, he says to us, 'Here, boys, just take a holiday on me next month. I'll give you all a play-day' — 'and you can hand me all your votes.' I s'pose we ought to smile, and say 'Thankee, thankee kindly, sir, of course we'll do as how you want us.' 'Fine,' says I" — and the old man's scorn was worth while — "We will — not! How about it?"

There was a rumbling of unqualified assent. It was plain they agreed as to mind; they looked to each other for plans.

"Don't know, 'm sure, what sort o' platform this here Gates is runnin' on, but to me it doesn't make but mighty little difference.

"Just what's a platform, anyway, I'm asking

ye? Don't know? I didn't either, onct, but this here's my idea now. It's somethin' built skimpy to look big; laid wide and thin, spread out, you might say. Sometimes they paint it over thick with promises or whitewash it with lies so you can't see the cracks or holes, and don't dast notice the red-rot that honey-combs it. Such as it is it's builded up of old, cull, loose-knot lumber — you know the kind I mean? — and painted nice, maybe. The platform's legs are wormy, too, but usually it stands a couple o' months or so, holdin' candidates up so poor ones kin see the show. And afterwards — afterwards they kick it clean to little pieces, or else it falls apart itself when the election's over and they've one an' all climbed off.

"No, sir! Old stuff don't go with me. There ain't much of me left, right now, but what there is is fight! clear to the bone. Answer up! Ain't ye that a-way too?"

And they all yelled, just as one, "You bet!"

The old chap's face relaxed. His eyes watered, and a tear or two worked down his gaunt, lined cheeks.

"Boys, I haven't ever told a soul's long as I've been with you. Maybe I oughn't now, but yet I think I will, tonight. Can't seem to hold it in much longer, 'sides, it might help all around. I've known this Gates a heap sight longer'n worser'n any of you, and if it all hadn't a been he wouldn't be runnin' maybe this fall, and I wouldn't be wiltin' away up here."

"What do you mean, old boy? Spick plain." It was Witzke, and the others nodded.

The broken figure for a moment straightened on its box. The watery eyes unclosed a little more, the lids winked back some tears and the lips on the loose, weak mouth were formed an instant in new lines, or perhaps *they were very old.*

"It's soon told. I couldn't make it long, I couldn't" — slowly — "it always kind of gets me.

"A good bit back, thirty year come this fall I make it, though it seems most all my life, I had a home in Mapleton. I had a business, too, 'bout like this, and a wife — but I can't speak much of her. She was wonderful, best in the world I thought, and I was never good enough by half to even touch her hand. She was young, too, much younger than me, and I was mighty happy in our life. It filled my days and I was satisfied. I thought she was.

"We, I, had money, friends, everythin' I needed and I thought just what she wanted, too. Gates was a friend of mine. Sometimes when I was tired, for I was happy with our home and didn't care to leave it much, he and his wife took mine, and the three'd go off for a day or an evening. I was glad to have her and I liked Gates. He wasn't rich then, not a bit, as I think back to it now, but he was always busy and I called him a right good sort.

"But I was too old for that crowd, and I never minded when they all went off and left me. First Elma — that was my wife — said she wouldn't think of going, and I sort o' had to make her. But after awhile I didn't have to urge so much and they all went out a sight more. I think Mrs. Gates was a good woman though gettin' vain, for she had been a poor girl and was going 'round with a different set. She always seemed fond of my wife, and so one night when Mr. Gates come over and said she wanted to see Elma, I told her "go," of course.

"And she went. I was reading and after awhile I must have dropped away for a little, for when I woke the room was cold. I shivered — I can recollect it all so plainly, it's burnt in heart-deep — and got up to

put another log inside the grate. When I did I looked at the clock. It was 'way past midnight. I waited 'round a little longer, for they'd often stayed as late before, but I got sort of uneasy and thought to myself, 'I'll just run over to Gates', and see what's keepin' her.'

"It was just across the street, so I slipped on my shoes, put a coat across my shoulders and ran over. The house was dark. 'That's queer,' I thought, 'where do you s'pose they are?' But I went up the steps and knocked, I rang the bell, too, and after awhile their servant came, looking as if she'd been asleep. 'Where's Mrs. Gates?' I says, 'and Mr. Gates? Where's everybody, anyway, tonight?'

" 'Mrs. Gates?' she says, 'Mrs. Gates? Why, Mrs. Gates is gone for a week. Mr. Gates hasn't come yet. He ought to be here any minute, and you can wait if you like.' I thought I would. 'Probably though,' I says to myself, 'they've been makin' a call somewhere, playin' a joke on me.' I wanted to see him on a little business anyway, so I just made up my mind to wait.

"After awhile, hours it seemed, I heard somebody on the stairs. I went out, and just caught sight o' Gates. He was in a dressin' gown and slippers, and had a smoky lamp in one hand. 'What's the trouble, Dick?' he called out sort of shaky.

" 'Trouble! Where is Elma?'

" 'Elma? I took her home an hour or so ago. Where you been, anyway, Dick? What's up?'

"That was too much. I jumped toward him and the lamp in his hand almost fell, for my wife ran down the stairs, looked sort of calmly at us both and said, 'Now, Dick, don't make a fuss. Go home. You might as well know, too, that I never really cared for you at all. *I'm* very grateful because you have been good to me,

more like a father' — oh! how that hurt, that last — 'but I have cared much more for Holden, always!'

"I stumbled at the staircase, and Elma went away. I think I would have killed him, then, but he wasn't so slow to show a gun.

"The rest of it has eaten up my life, my life-time, but it is quickly told. That night before I left I sold my business and my place in town, and only asked him to be good to her. He said he would. God! I wonder where she's gone?

"I went away. My heart was broken and I did not care for anything. They gave out both of us had started on a trip, but I was all alone that day and so it has gone on for pretty near to twenty years. The little money that I took from Gates was quickly lost. He promised to send on the rest. I heard from him, once, after that. Said he'd invested it, *my money*, from *my mill*. He put it in a bank. He wrote the bank had failed. I didn't know. He never told me of my wife, my Elma. I drifted here. I guess I'd changed, and I got work. Nobody knew. I've seen him up here since and he has scrambled up as far as I've sunk down. I didn't think he even knew me. Perhaps he did, but didn't grudge the bit of bread I earned from him.

"In those old days I had a wife, I had a home, a business. And I was happy," he rambled on. "Mapleton knew Richard Crimmins" — two of his hearers gave a start — "and honored him, for he had money, and a business and he owned a mill, and the woods at . . ."

"The Fork!" cried Thorn and Boddfish, for they had known the rest, and the old Admirable had just pieced out the tale. But the thread in the loom was almost gone and the old man was drooping now. Friendly arms reached for his shoulders, while great red, honest hands were taking his and drink was forced

between his lips. He had leaned on liquor for many years, and it slowly braced him now.

Thorn spoke. "What Rogers, or Crimmins, has told us now can only strengthen our minds and tighten our grip for work put off only too long. I, personally, can think of only one sure way to seek our ends. We can agree with him as to the building of *their* platform. So we will build our own. We must.

"Can you think of a man to shape it for us, to keep the same himself when it is done? A man who is one of us, lived what we live, felt what we feel, worked where we work, yet aimed for something higher and is bigger by that much? Yes, I can think of just one such. I know he has the Fork with him. He may not be old in years, but he has got our goods!

"I would suggest that none of what has gone on here tonight be given out at present but that we, as delegates of the United Workers, fulfill our duty and make our recommendation as requested.

"And, to my mind, the one best recommendation is a remedy. Let each of us write down the name of some one man that he would like to work for, whom he feels would like to work for him, who is *of* him, and will always be *for* him. He will win, I know it!"

So they did and though chirography was varied, when Witzke and Cosmo counted things over the sum of the writings spelled Johnson.

The meeting adjourned.

XXXIII

SINCE the day of their successful founding the United Workers of the Woods and Mill had had some time for organizing. More, they had pioneered well.

There was little secrecy at first, and some who helped at preparation had briefly gone forth from the small board shacks. They left the Fork to settle elsewhere, and took their message with them.

The cry that went out from the wooded highlands grew until it spread far down the valleys and even to the quiet places, one man here and still another there. They saw that it was good, indeed, far stronger than men had ever hoped, and gradually there shaped the slogan: "LABOR FOR LABOR, WORK FOR THE MAN WHO WILL WORK FOR YOU." The day of the harvest was close at hand, and they thought they had found a reaper.

But when they came to Johnson with this tale, they were very much nearer failing than starting. He was bewildered and surprised, of course, after the usual fashion: he laughed at them and then was sober. He was young and untrained and he felt it more than they, for in the darkened workshop of the world twenty-five shoulders a hod with not more effort than sixty.

They took no one of his excuses. They snowed him under with urging. And Cosmo Thorn was there, and talked persistently; while Witzke fumed; and Bodd-fish coaxed; and finally to the tune of Hal Jenkins' thundering and earnest pleas, he gave completely in. "Johnson, boy, it must be *you!*" they said. "You are our one investment."

And Johnson saw they meant just that, so he finally did as he had wished to all along. His life had been a chance, a wish, why not attempt a crazy shot?

Both Gates and Vogel ceased from needing Johnson. No more did the latter want them. They had expected a poor lawyer, and had engendered a worse candidate. Gates grunted out "Ungrateful ass," and Vogel just

said, "Fool!" To them of course it was all a joke, "*natura non fecit saltum*," as Vogel aptly put it.

It was sufficiently real to him. His leaving them was simple. He was netting a scratch-living there. In fact, he had so long been a part of Vogel, Gates and Busby that he had felt some time it would not serve much longer. They were working up one way, he had grown out another. It was good time to go. He moved his worldly truck to Dave's.

One lamented his passing. On his last morning there the dun old harridan who tried half-heartedly to clean the office, without at all succeeding, was still at work when he came to get his things. Probably it was pay-morning, for then she was assiduous in spilling baskets and hiding dirt. The way of her cleansing was one poor subterfuge after another. The gift of the job was Busby's and he had let her shift along. For one thing, she did not touch his stacks and piles and varied, valued muss. Perhaps he owned a fellow-feeling.

Glimpsing his preparations, she hurried on to Johnson's desk to ask him all about it. Yes, he was quitting them. No, he was not going out of Mapleton, but he was leaving here. Yes, no doubt for good, no doubt. The messy old woman strayed about. She came back near his desk. She looked troubled, and her eyes were wet, more watery than usual above the dusty spectacles.

"Mr. Andrew, 'fore ye go, I *will* say this: I wish you wasn't. Ye'r the only one as had a word o' kindness for a poor old fool like me. Couldn't never stand those two old birds back there" — a hand jerked toward the partners' private office — "and them two easy-gabbing flyabouts hits me all wrong. As for that spattered ink-well" — a dusty finger in the way of Busby — "I'd like to see the last o' that old cuss for good."

She sighed.

"My God! I ain't come near to feel as bad since Elder Parsons died. He used to give me apples off his trees, for Tom, the boy I had that weakened in the lungs. Old Elder used to give me apples for him. I got two dollars when I helped to lay him out."

A pure tear passed along her cheek, and was stopped by a dirty hand.

William caught up to him when he had got outside. "Good-bye, Mr. Johnson, good-bye — and" (the boy whispered it) "I hope you win! Though probably you won't." As for dear old "Busy" Busby, he merely peeked up from behind his stacked-high work entrenchments, added, "Don't know how any good'll come of it. Fine chance to waste your time," grunted, and was gone. *He* was busy, *he* didn't have time to care whether the country went in for paper-backed peace tracts, worked its men on a sixteen-hour scale, or sucked on the eternal lollypop of graft. He was a native-reared *American*; and *germs* grew up by night among the foreign-born.

The campaign progressed on it tri-headed way. The two old parties raised much issue. Judged solely by the third, they had presented on their stage three "isms": pacifism, hyphenism and a bad third, patriotism. The latter, though, was largely raised by the very last of the parties. It was not a hydra stirred to life by any of the rest. "*Laissez faire*," said they, "because the world is in the boiling pot we do not need to touch the fire. We do not like the fire; ergo, the fire will not touch us." Meanwhile it did.

Lines, though, were queerly drawn. You could not tell exactly where your fellow stood. You saw the sanguinary blast of War. It was the third year, *good* people said the last. The national diaphragm had been *disturbed*, the heart of their country struck faster.

All the world trembled. It was not by you, or near you, it was of you. The country was divided, and as the country so also Hamlin County. It was only the mêlée of red blood and white. Men of business thought, but quickly shrugged their shoulders and passed on. Not so the rabble. They gathered together in many places and where their little houses would not hold them all they met in a back room of Dave's, or at the "Farmers' Rest Cafe" across the street. With biting drink and stronger words they struck the light pine tables such conscientious blows as made good beer mugs rattle. It looked as though they had a candidate. The candidate, astounded, had found himself a party. It was born in mid-summer, might die in November, but all the while it grew. There was even an organization, honest but complete.

Neither rested much. They took a new breath, spat on their hands, got a fresh hold, and went on.

There was speaking. Gates, prompted by Vogel and hotly backed by Grubbs and his, forebore to take much part or stock in this. Let others get tired out. The fire was sizzling. You could feel it all around, but the warmth had not yet reached him. He did one night *address* a small meeting of friends on our new national pride. As no one asked what it was, he managed very well. Had such a one, Vogel would no doubt have filled the breach. Gates was the supposed possessor of much brain. Labor styled him a child of luck, but only the rich man's kind. When people met and Gates was there, Vogel stood by too.

Johnson did not spare himself, though never sanguine as his backers. They were earnest and even optimistic. Johnson had few illusions, and some hope. He used his right hand lavishly and spoke somewhat from boxes. *He did* well and had applause. Jenkins was always

egging him on, and Johnson was strong in small homesteads. He intended a bigger effort.

If Gates steeled himself toward the election in terms of ennui, not so his rival on another side. With all the empty eagerness of the high-prided zealot, Mr. Jenny was ever here and there, a-flutter from township to township, spreading the gospel of "peace without mirth; good will to any" — "any with votes," old Boddfish said.

One day at noon good Jenny elected to speak on national offense to they of the Mapleton work-shops. He had been working the other towns. No one here had heard him, and there was a crowd. Mr. Bodeheaver was present, having with much inward shuddering he was afraid to show worked through a crowd of sweaty workers just out of dirty shops. But as he said when he got there, "*Here* was a man as did your heart real good to see."

No Jenny up to date had been to Congress, and it is difficult to see how this high-infidel of preparation had made successfully such strides of vesture in walking toward those hallowed halls. He was faithful indeed to the sacred Prince Albert. He had a white necktie clamped under sharp-descending collar-points. He still ran true in chop-like Congress whiskers, full-blown, ultra-ministerial and free, that dropped sufficiently low down to make that necktie a party of the second part. He was as good as a leaf of the *Congressional Record*.

He was also just a little late, but there were estimable people of the town who met him at the station and rushed him thence with all alacrity. Despite that he came to them blown of wind and red of face. The crowd good-naturedly had let him through.

"Make way for Makepeace," "Hi, there, Jen, old boy," with other friendly cries announced him.

The puffing candidate was set upon the box that served as platform. He introduced himself.

"Good people." Waves of applause. Loud-toned whisper, "'Good people,' me eye!"

"Good people, I know you are here, actuated by a common impulse and noble purpose. I feel it in me. That you, busy working people of this day and age, should steal a moment of your single hour at noon to hear the tidings that I bring to you augurs most well for the future of this country. And the future of your country is *your* future, my friends. Surely not even our friends on the other side would attempt denial of that. It is a law of economics, and a concomitant of labor."

Voice from the crowd, "Hey, get busy, or get down!"

"Yes, yes, I am coming to that, my friend. Grant me but a moment. Ahem! As I see so many interested countenances upturned today, toward the platform, I am reminded of a little story I heard the other day, A man was working, ploughing a field not many miles from your beautiful city, and he happened to turn up a stone. It was not a very big stone, but he picked it up, and threw it over the fence into another field that belonged to him. So someone who happened to see him do it spoke to him and said, 'Why, Si, why did you do that? Ain't that your field, too?' So Si said, 'Yes, but I don't plough that till next year.'

"My friends, it seems to me that this little story illustrates in most graphic form a very great truth."

"What? Out with it!"

"Why, that truth is that we may very well put off till another day, or another year, things that vex us *today*. There are mussy men around us, agitators *I call them*, who say you are not satisfied: you want

a change, that you wish this, and need that. My friends, you have a wonderful opportunity for good and you should be happy to put your trust in hands that will take real care of it, for you. Take no thought for dangers that will never arise — they never have. You are alive, or you would not be here today. I hope I have made myself plain."

A voice, "You bet!"

"This is a grand, good country. It is at peace, and if we do nothing but hope for peace we shall surely find it. It is a wonderful country. It is one of the largest countries in the world today. It has great oceans on each side of it, and many, many people. Good people, too, the best people of God's earth. I have abiding faith in the common people, and I feel sure they will do nothing to change it in any way. We are well off now. Let well enough alone. Why go out of your way to prepare for anything that has never hurt us? Surely, it never will. I know you are satisfied now, and I am going to keep you just the same. But you must help me.'

"Sure." A shuffling of feet, and an accompaniment of dinner-pails.

"One moment more. The greatest need of the working man today is work, more work. We will give it to him . . ."

Loud voice, from in front, "It ain't. Less work, less politics, *more money*. Give *those* to us, and you've done something. Am I right, boys?"

"Right as a rivet, Hal!" "Well done, old boy."
"Time's up, Jen!"

Just then, to be sure, the first of the five-minute whistles blew and a hard-used piece of breadcrust went through the air to mat itself in the good left wing of the worthy Makepeace's whiskers.

"Too proud to pipe," one grimy fellow put it as they turned their backs on politics and went to work.

Perceiving a period, Mr. Jenny retired in good order.

XXXIV

BARBARA looked again. No, not in her many years could she commence to recall the real masses of people that surged uneasily about the stodgy streets of sober Mapleton. All day they had been straggling in, and the night train was due with more. It gave her a strange, uneasy feeling, and since she did not understand it she scarcely liked it. It was the night before — the eve of the election; of the trying of a people's strength; of what?

Loud, coarse voices reached in from the street to the little side porch of her home. Though softened a whit by distance, the sounds and dimming echoes were not more pleasant to her ears, and she shuddered slightly at the noisiness of *bourgeois* fun. It was the beginning of a holiday and the citizens, like sturdy Romans, made merry on the eve of great occurrences. Motives of the day were not the same, a country's fate merely to be wrestled out instead of puny lives. There was singing and showing of teeth, and now and then an officer had recourse to his stick to soften strong beliefs.

Ah, what has come to Mapleton? No more a haven for the weary, the happy, quiet haunt of tout and idler, time-spendthrift and gossip. Another Eldorado is hastening away. Its lazy air of drowsiness is shrinking fast, not only on tonight. Traditional insouciance is *all but gone*. A sleeper, stirred at last, has turned up

on his back, has stretched, pronounced a couple gapes, and finally made to rise. Where now tonight the silly, talking lot of men on old Dave's steps, their *vis-à-vis*, that loafing mess of boys which once was draped across the corner opposite? Their microcosm is a vanished joy. Fresh generations cannot heir to creaking chairs and wheezy pipes across the street. Sad.

Another old, worn callous on the nation has felt the life-pulse of its country. Blood stirs again, and red corpuscles run amuck.

Changed, indeed, thought Barbara, as Ezra Bodeheaver hastened by, worming through the crowd, elbowing sometimes too, forcing a lane for himself and a staff with a banner awave from its top. Other old conservatives were out at sea among the throng and just across the street was Mr. Busby, on the threshold of his office door, his hand on the knob as the poor old chronic wavered betwixt town politics and duty. How blithsome to bide with one were t'other dear charmer away. And this is the night of the torch-light parade. The outcome is all too patent — Busby goes in.

Office lights downstairs flashed on. Barbara saw. How many long weeks were lost since the tiny window above had been warmed by a flame at night. She had seen him very little since the Club. She had known of his selection by the labor force, of course. Her father for a while was very full of it.

Andrew had never returned. She could see reasons, no lack. Yet when they sometimes met, to speak so briefly, was there some nuance in the way he felt toward her? Doubts wrestled in her own girl-heart, where many things arise that cannot satisfactorily be sent away. But they had been together for so long and now — this, this was hard.

The great house was lonesome, and she. A tear

crept down her cheek and Barbara was unashamed. She missed him, the light from the poor little window too. Of course she could never have told him that — how could she? All women answer no — but it was dark enough so that she failed to mind confessing to herself. She would have soundly lectured *him*.

If he would only come. She was for him, always. How can men be so blind, unless they wish it?

It seemed quiet, terribly so. It was not, for beyond the fence the world flowed by, and played, and shouted, and cursed, and sang, and found in tonight enough to enjoy.

Suddenly there rose a shouting, and promenaders left the sidewalk for the street. Cries of "Yeh! There he goes." "What's the matter with Johnson?" and "Hi, there, Andy! How are you, boy?" broke in upon her silence.

Impulsively the girl stepped to the rail. A rather senile vehicle was passing up the street, its coming heralded by shouts from all along. It passed below the street lamp on her corner. Yes, in the front of the rickety, lumbering equipage sat Andy, his face confident and pleased as he responded to the crowd. By him, and piling in behind, were Jenkins, "Hub" Sanders too, and some strange, rough-seeming men, with — yes, that queer, poor fellow from the Fork. What was it Andrew said they called him? "The Admirable," that was it. He looked even stranger and older tonight, but his face was ashine and he yelled to the horses that dragged them along.

Even he had caught it, thought the girl. Then, "caught what?" she asked herself and answered, "I'm going to find out!"

Her mother, undeterred by the election — so many persons voted nowadays, to be sure — but inwardly

exalted by the shadow of the capital, was being fitted for a Bridge. Barbara ran in. "Mamma, Mamma! I'm going down to tell Jerry to get the car and take me downtown."

"What? what! You'll do no such thing. Tonight of all nights. I never heard of such a thing. (There, there, Marie, no tighter. It's all right, *all right*, I tell you!) I wouldn't think of it."

"Father is down at the office. I'm going to get him and go to the speaking."

"My dear child, I would *much prefer* to have you stay at home."

"But ladies do go, over in England. I know they do. They speak, too. I shouldn't mind the crowd."

"Well, well, I can't wait to talk with you about it. I'm so tired getting ready for that Bridge. (A little more just here, Marie. But not too much. *Be careful.*) Then I suppose you must. But come home early, and see to it your Father does too."

"I will, *dear* Mother. Hope you enjoy the party. Good-night!"

Old Jerry appeared in a second, broadly speaking, and Barbara was in the car in less. "Down to the Post Office, Jerry."

"Yes, Miss."

The car swung out the drive and passed through the gate to the street. Jerry stepped on the siren, but almost overran a portly gentleman, who curved himself concavely to defeat the impact.

Once in the street they had to weave their way about as they crawled downtown, grazing on the one side a hay-rack empty of the staple but loaded down with people, and almost touching on the other a carry-all of bouncing girls and rustic swains, all in from up-country for the parade and speechifying. It was an

animated scene and Barbara missed little as Jerry brought her near the business quarter.

As there were some swarms of visitors and natives near the Court House, there were black masses here. With difficulty the driver took the girl up Main Street to the Office. By dint of tight driving and long-drawn sounding of his horn Jerry found a space not too remote, and left to get the mail.

Barbara had had to get away, off into the noise and the people, the life that buzzed and pulsed and sounded all about. She was almost as anxious to get herself out, for the uproar was harsh in her ears and there was much that was not pleasant to the sight. Down by the bridge a bulk of people was streaming Dave's way from the station. A gay, bright-colored throng it was and even now, so far away, one ear-marked of the woods. The evening train had got in from the Fork, a shoving pack of real humanity had been disgorged from its caboose and dumped from loaded flat-cars on the town. The town would willingly have turned them back, but chance complaining burghers were not noticed. A huge hand held the woodhicks and it pushed them on, on over the town where tomorrow, probably, they would register their wishes and make their voices heard in the chorus of the country all about.

A happy touch of reminiscence caught the girl as men surged past the wooden bridge and neared her. She saw Pete's flannel mackinaw or Hans' green hat and white wool socks, Black Charley's small plush cap and Oley's high, black boots with nails upon the soles, with here, far in the van, a great, wide-chested chap whose face was wreathed in crimson whiskers, his bull neck carelessly encased in red bandanna. On they came.

Here and there a fat, black bottle left a pocket and found a mouth; then more mouths. There was shouting and whistling and loud guffaws, and the air was sounding with many words it did no good to hear.

The girl in her car shuddered, and looked inside the Office for her driver. He was half-way to the window in a line which hardly moved. Men still came, men and half-formed youths, with here and there a woman's figure and a waster's face, some garish clothing on a hard-used form, the seeking visage of the street. What part had she, herself, in all of this? What part, indeed? What share had anyone? To whom the credit for the swarm that still advanced with warming cries and gradually augmented roar?

Come opposite to Dave's, some broke and ran to gain first place upon the other side. Bright, flaring lights caught Barbara's eyes as she turned to see that way. A sluggish stream went in and out a pair of swinging doors. There were square, small mirrors in them and more than a single plaid-coated chap paused for an instant to size up his liquored, flame-shot face as he passed in to add yet more to the searing fuel of their night.

As she turned, a figure shot from the door. A strong arm and a leather foot were back of it, and many a hand reached out to shove the reeling form before it reached the ditch, and fell. The young girl looked away.

Along her side the jacks from the Fork came opposite the car. She saw one fellow speak to a girl and another man reach out to take him by the throat, to choke him just a second before he gave the blow. The face of that girl had flushed, and she tried to get away from all the crowd that blocked her in. Barbara was young but she was brave, impulsive. She leaned from

her seat as if to get that other girl's attention. The girl did not see, but a hand hairy and black, dirt-caked and bruised by work, came toward her from the mass. A voice cried out,

"Ah, there, Mary! Mighty gay night for such as you with boobs like us about. Give us a kiss, eh?"

The girl recoiled as the hand advanced, and it was very near her when a stooping, ugly brute pitched in from out of the ruck of them, twisted the hand so it dropped away, and left a howling, cursing fellow in the mob. The squat one hopped to the edge of the car, then finished by giving a kick in the face that snarled and was spitting back.

"Oh, Grubbs, don't! Please don't!" cried the girl.

The *Quasimodo* got ready for the return attack and the crowd, fast gathering, roared up its benediction. Some of the shouts were of Barbara's beauty and she was faint with their coarseness; others championed the swearing, unfortunate one, who was coming on again. There were a few, fairer, who cried for Grubbs and shouted,

"That's the stuff, Hunchy! Hand it to him good. Give him hell!"

Before it arrived Jerry came, and since he was enough of a man to proceed for once without orders they started rapidly. One or two got struck as they went, while Grubbs, still on the running-board, repelled effectually with one free foot a stiff departing rush from the breeder of their trouble.

Barbara groped for something to say, and when she tried to speak her thanks the stooping figure was no longer there. Jerry turned for orders and gave the mail to Barbara. A copy of the *Crier* was the price of their *rencontre*.

Mr. Gates was fuming by the office — "Where had

she been; he had been waiting; Vogel was ready; the parade was starting;" much beside. Hermann Vogel came running down the steps and both were in the car in half-a-jiffy.

Across from Gates' mansion, fronting the Court House square, was a platform. Normally it smacked of dry goods boxes and rough lumber mixed with scantling, but tonight it was covered with red, white and blue, and there were chairs with several ministers. It was irregular, but Mrs. Gates wouldn't know in time to prevent, so Barbara attained the platform with the men. She found a small chair for herself, the lawyers being generally preoccupied, and placed it slightly to the rear. Several others sat just forward, so that she was not left conspicuous, though able to enjoy.

She heard the complaint of the slide trombone, the whine of some straggling reeds, and the parade was in the offing. It passed the office of Gates & Vogel, and came on fast. It was in two parts: 1. The Mapleton Jubilee Band; 2. the Young Men's Gates Club. The Band was "augmented" tonight. There were twenty and they made a good, strong showing. The Club had twice as many. The Reverend Sykes, by Mr. Gates, was fain to rub his hands and say, "A welcome sight. A wholesome spectacle."

The marchers approached four-abreast. Torches flared with unadulterated kerosene, while rank black smoke and drops of oil assailed the lucky near-by. Half raised one foot, half the other, like marching lodges or school children. Their captain, hoisting up a flag, went on unconscious of them.

There stood out fore and aft the good, four-sided signs which handed you new lies for old. Phrases jumped out in their clear black paint, whatever

character the sentiments might lack, and Barbara assimilated several: "THE NEW AMERICANISM," "A FULL STOMACH AND A LOT LEFT," "WE'VE KEPT YOU OUT OF WARS," "RALLY! GOOD PARTY MEN," "VOTE FOR THE PARTY THAT FILLS YOUR POCKETS." As Barbara saw and read the last, a man clear down in the crowd said something shocking to a neighbor. Barbara, of course, did not hear "Oh, hell! *Whose* pockets?" It was a very good parade, and ordinarily the *Crier* would have given it three columns, front, in her next regular edition.

Since all things terminate the band blew past, the Young Men's Club deployed, and "New Americanism" got lost in the crowd. The marchers scattered to good applauding points.

All was as appointed. A neighboring preacher furnished the prelude, since it is policy for politics to be forgiven in advance.

The Reverend Isaac Sykes, unfearing, was next to forge ahead. His part in rallies was predestined. He presented "Flag of the Free," entirely alone. He did it for all parties, or with less excuse. He took liberties with words, began quite high, discovered it too late, but was a bitter-ender. One forgot the shoulders in one's face, the elbows in one's side, the feet upon one's foot. Some at his invitation participated in the closing chorus. Mr. Sykes, seated and winded, hugged triumph to his reverend chest.

The *Crier* had announced that day that Mr. Hermann Vogel would instruct them on "The New Americanism." He coined it himself and "Good strong stuff" it was, as Mr. Gates admitted. It fitted well with the flag-waving and log-rolling.

Vogel, nicely introduced, began his text. His text was Gates, but that the crowd would never know until

the proper time, when waves of great enthusiasm would automatically arise, engulf: the flood of which would cause his subject to himself exude a few entirely impromptu and carefully chalked out remarks; the ebb of which would aid materially in floating votes next day.

"My friends!" began Mr. Vogel. What he actually said sounded like "Mine Vriens," but we translate for those who take their English straight.

"My friends, this is a great day. For long I have lived and hoped that I would see a day like this, a day the workingman can cast his vote just right, can cast his vote and feel it is not wasted."

The crowd seemed friendly, though a lone voice offered, "Whatdye mean, 'wasted?'" As he paused a spitting of hands arose, and it was most remarkable that the applause sprang chiefly from appointed corners, or was nearly always lighted by a "Young Men's" torch.

The speaker was in an amiable mood. It showed in the arrogant set of his back, and from the spiny up-turn of his thick moustache.

"Friends, for long you have heard much talk of what the country is, also what it is for. The leaders you have had for several years have looked at it one way, I and very many of you, my friends, another. When they went into office all things were not as they are now. If you then voted for them you could not know, of that I am certain quite, what the future would bring or they would do, those ones who think they must think for you.

"They like to tell you just what you would have, would need, those men. They say they protect you, that they must 'interpret' this, and that, for you. They say they will protect you. Do they, always? They

protect you here, perhaps, and they desert you there. I would not criticize.

"Yet by protection — what do they mean? Surely you are always well protected here at home. You have all you could require. No cause to spend good dollars, *your* dollars! for things you have never needed. You never will.

"When I came a poor boy, years ago, I looked to your grand Government, your factions, and I said, 'Which is the party which takes care of the laboring, the *poor*, like me?' How I found the answer, and where I found the answer you maybe know. Else I would not be here tonight. So.

"This party, my party, is not for, what you say, 'Pacifism.' Many times, no! But we do not see the urge of losing many dollars that you earn for such things as you will never need. The people I still know, back in my homeland, they love the people of America. They are very fond of them. You — We! — need never be afraid of them. They would only wish to see you the fine country you are now, good friend to all!"

"Yeh! Great! Keep it up," from the crowd.

"I thank you, my friends. I am an American. That is, I have lived over here. I came a stranger and I have grown to love it, very much. It was good to me, and I shall never go back. (Hand-clapping at designated corners.) It was a fine country then, and it is better now. But we must make it better yet. How to do, then?"

"Yep! How ye goin' to do it?"

"We must be fair in everything, above all fair and good to ourselves. We should not let sympathies, emotions, take us far from things that matter, the good *material* things. We should be practical, we should *not* try this helping game which we must pay for. We

should do as our best citizens wish to do. You know not what to expect from many. You do from us. We would help you. And *you* must help the men who would assist your brains and muscle with much money."

"Once I have heard, in this country, everything it was for love of the country. It was only something to work for, maybe something to fight for. I do not understand. My party says, men who are running for the party say: '*Love for the countryman, all people; the 'New Americanism.'*'

"It is a great country, it is so great it will take care of itself, almost. It has, for many years. Isn't that quite good enough?"

"What're you givin' us?" came from the crowd.

"I give you facts, as an American."

"Then get a real American! We don't need 'hyphens,' " a score of voices bawled.

"I am telling you that when you will elect a man like the Honorable Gates" — at this a chorus of sound — cheers or sneers? — "we will then all be taken care of, well. You will not have to do more than you are doing now. He does not much believe in the kind of military things some men are talking. I, I have tried them. They are terrible, unspeakable. He will work only for you, will always try to get you work, I promise you."

"And how about pay? Tell us that *Mr. Vogel*." The men came crowding forward. The jam was fearful; the voices rumbled and broke like surf on a rocky shore.

"I have only a little more that I can say. And then Mr. Gates, he will tell you for himself what the people's party, the *safe* party, can do for you. Wait!" — as the noise intensified — "Wait, I have a little more."

"Waits" were as well unuttered. They hemmed

around the platform. Gates was nervous, but Barbara was lost in the scene's *mêlée*. Reverend Sykes shifted seats and added his voice to Mr. Vogel's, "Wait, good people, wait, And quiet!"

"That's it, go to it, Rev.," they shouted back and from the seas of muttering voices harsh cries, louder than all the rest, were heard.

"Oh, *Andy!*" "Where's Andy?" "Get a flesh-and-blood American." "Give us a regular fellow!" "Find the lad who spouts the truth." "Where's *our* favorite son?" "Enough of this foreign guy." "Way for the Boy Orator o' the Fork!" A breaking-up appeared far out among the crowd.

Mr. Schwab, who all the evening had had his nose in a notebook in the corner, at the "press-box," buried his face in his memo and ended with a sob. He was covering the evening for the *Crier*. He gave up.

XXXV

"WHAT do you call an American? *What does it mean to you?*"

"Tell me, Mr. Vogel, and you, Holden Gates! You boys, you men down here in front. And you — Reverend Sykes. I wonder just how you could answer.

"I take a liberty in asking you. Now I shall take another: I shall answer for you, answer as I think each one of you would wish to have his speech — perhaps his own real thoughts — handed out now to the man in the crowd."

Johnson's heart kept ahead of his words, but when the current of his speech was on his sentences came tumbling out — unasked. Urged on by Hal, the huge

blacksmith his friend, by Boddfish and the Fork, large hands had cut a way and placed him on the platform. He had stood in the pack, with the men; the rest occurred automatically. His time was not self-chosen, but it was here.

For one instant he lost his wits. Vogel behind was stamping his feet on the floor, Gates muttering to his lieutenants. Sykes cleared his throat successively and rapidly; and out in front, ah, out in front — there rose at once a thousand faces. They held him longest, *those faces*, dirty and bearded and rough, brutishly bloated or horribly sharp, framed by their dun old hats, the brighter tints and wide-made shoulders of the woods uprearing them below.

He was thinking quickly. After all it lay in how you saw them: Gates looked and was afraid; Vogel, despising them, talked down, attempted flattery and school-boy reasoning. Both failed. *The truth*. They wanted that! Men gave their lives in searching. It was not much, but there were other things the market of the world must always sell, that *something just as good*.

A whisper reached him, "Andrew!" No one else presumably had heard the call. It was little, and enough.

Browning, fire-scarred timber and brush upreared before his eyes and in it, nestled down, was something squat, and soiled. It clung very close to the heart of the earth and smoke came from its mouth, an endless pall; weird shouts and muttered curses echoed in its ears; the sweat of labor, and of Life and Death, ran down its face; a weakened, grub-like stream possessed its body. And Andy looked, and saw there men and women. God! Was that Life? No, it was the Fork.

The Truth, did they want? So help him, they should have it.

"Yes, you out there, what do you call a real four-square American? Many of you have had most of your life already. And you, even you who cannot clear your throats and look well back to days of 'sixty-one or 'seventy-one, you have been through one campaign of politics at least when a great deal was talked of all this. *You know*. If it were given me to pick the chap to tell me what he is! and what his country stands for! I should look straight away to the man who works and the fellow who pays."

"Yeh, yeh! You're comin' to it, Johnson. Say on, Andy. Give us more."

The crowd had lost its terrifying faces, was merged for him in one, an upturned countenance that showed harsh work and useless striving, a face long buying its right to know.

"First, though, I should go to the 'pacifist.' Customarily I wouldn't look for him among the ministers. Sometimes you'd find him there, but there are also 'fighting parsons,' and it always seemed to me that when the preacher fights an ordinary man had better run. He is as good as two or three, your minister, for usually he knows what he's about, and if he does he's pretty generally backed up by right, which always helps. He isn't *half-in-half*.

"No, I shouldn't study ministers for pacifists. I should try among the men who never look ahead and seldom watch behind. Whether that is due to constitutional defects, a little practical near-sightedness, I never quite worked out. Maybe you could help me, but we won't spend much of your time or mine, upon his sort. It doesn't justify it. Sometimes, or oftener, they're square about it. That makes it harder. As you know, they disbelieve or claim to in any sort of preparation. Their arguments don't often go with ministers and

good insurance people. Why underwrite your life, and soul, and house if you have got 'em now? Good pacifists are consistent. They never want another district school, or filling up that muddy road of yours in up-to-date macadam. When he is honest and stubborn it takes a powerful physic to clean the vitals of the country of him. But it will be done.

"There is another, though, a very leech that saps the growing strength and power of all of us from day to day. You found him in the Revolution. He was a Tory. He lived among Americans, and in America. They sometimes clubbed him on the head or used a charge of shot. There is nothing like *fight* to clear the air and draw men very close; or knock them out when they won't be persuaded.

"Down through the nation the Tories run. Sometimes they are not foes. In 'ninety-eight, 'it is alleged' they fed cheap, poisoned food-stuffs to some volunteers. As in the days of Washington, they merely worked behind.

"Today he has another name. Kings have denied their contact with him, as kings will always do when their small human tools prove weak and futile. But in this case the Tory up-to-date is strong enough to cause wise men to wince, and stop for thought. Some *good* Americans endeavored to ignore it, but while they went along it lived and grew. The first *pacifist* of which we spoke I shall make bold call to call American. He is of us though not with us. He is not wicked; only weak. The latter is most certainly not an American. From any man's land he may hail and to no man's land belong. Leaving one spot a malcontent, he seeks another. He takes its welcome with contempt; he eats its bread and bites the hand that offers it. Hail to the Hyphen!

"Is there a one of you who does not know of him? No! there is not, that I would swear. But is there one of you who would confess to being such, could even point one out? No, indeed, for the hyphen works under the ground. Far down in the bowels of our Nation he tunnels and goes, and when great works come crashing down nice people are surprised. For all have been equal, he as brave as the rest. Taking full toll of his equality, he operates until the show-down comes, seeking meantime what living things he may devour. And if America is in ascendancy — as may she always be! — then too is he American. And no one says him nay.

"But if another smirches the legends of our ancestors he plays his hand, and you may guarantee that he will have it covered well. Have I made it plain? Do you understand?"

"Yes! Go on! Go on!" There were earnest shouts from the crowd. "Give us more! Give us more!"

"No, 'Give us men!'" cried Johnson. "Not many years ago I lost my father. The manner of his going need not concern you, but when the earth was dropped in place above him my mother laid a flag upon the grave. It was not a large flag, and it was not very expensive. It was all she said. 'Remember the flag, — Andy,' she said to me. 'The father we know would have wished it so. The great Father who makes all things possible will not let harm touch *anyone* for loving it.'

"My father, men, was not born an American. He died one. He used to talk to me when I was a little lad, and he said: 'In some lands, son, it is every man for himself. Over here, before I die, I want to see deep-written on the heart of every man of us, "Where *country* comes before — and man behind!"' I should

like to think that old man's wish was realized. There have always been divisions. Honest divisions are our life-blood, pure democracy. Some say that the spirit of 'seventy-six is dead, but I prefer to think that it is only resting until the day when it is needed.

"Men, there never will be such another day as *now*. Two hundred years ago we had discussions, differences, the fallings-out of pioneers. What have we now? Of men for defense, dozens for hundreds, hundreds for thousands; platitudes for pistols; air for artillery; words for weapons. Sometimes I get discouraged about our country.

"Groups of poverty, of wealth, of politics. John Smith, one party, says to Bill Jones, same party, 'Here, Bill, this ain't a question of whether it's good for the *country*, but whether it's our party, and whether it's good for me! Don't you see? It's plain as the nose on a crocodile's face. Be *sensible*, Bill!'

"Well, if that is being 'sensible' — I say, 'To *hell* with being sensible!' Why not be plain American? I am afraid of many things. What I fear most is that our soul, our old-time national conscience, will be weakened, even killed. Such things have happened, and history runs riot with grim ruin. Cast out well-meaning pacifist and vicious hyphen, and get you back to *beginnings*.

"What is an American, then? Maybe I cannot tell you, either, but I should like to try. A citizen it seems to me is he who helps to put his country on a level with the kingdoms of the world, and when he's done it helps to keep it there; a man who gives to everyman his due in 'life, and liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.' 'Life' to live in decency and self-respect, normal, right-thinking, clean-breathing; 'Liberty' to hear a private conscience consecrated to a common

right; 'Liberty' to live cleanly, work humanly, love, marry, bear children and raise them to an even chance; 'Pursuit of happiness' in a country and a world, a city and a town, where the refreshing hours of night are not irrevocably lost to one degrading chain of days.

"A man who would live and let live, grow rich and clean in character by helping others to lay by, building, constructing, improving, *creating* — why, such a man, in my mind's-eye, is an American. This man, if he may live, no longer thinks (and such as that could never have) of building up his pile of wealth by pouring into it the tattered lives and toil-dulled minds of 'masses'; of lapping up the freshness and the life of little children; of piling up the stories of his world-built, tower-high structure with the mutilated hands of men who fall; of sapping our vitality by feeding into open maws of factories weak mothers who have babies at their breasts.

"And yet we have Gateses and Vogels."

A demonstration budded, but was quenched.

"Wives and new mothers work to keep the hound of hunger from their door; women try to join purity and poverty, and live; the babies of the poor die just three times as fast as those with golden spoons; school children — underfed and undernourished; men, women, children, babies, herd in one room at night, jammed beds, fouled air, morals that shred by the wayside. Great buildings reach the sky. A workman lends a life as cornerstone, for every floor. Factories build wealth; they also mold the weakling child whose growth is stopped, whose mind is checked, whose shoulders are hunched, whose eyes go out before their time. They build, and they consume. . . . I learned when I left the Fork. If labor and right can't live .

on their merits — then let them die. We cannot *hope* unless we fill the belly and feed the mind. It is great, that mind, but it is hungry.

"It must be, it must always be in a democracy, the unfettered rule of the people: rule of that people by the help of the best men they can get to lead them in the ways they need to go."

There was real silence. It was the first.

"There are many who gag at the flea of live growth, but would and do willingly swallow the time-eaten lion of penny-politics and senile partisanship. 'The workingman wants work' indeed, and he must have it too, full-time, backed by a living that is all-American — American clean through! Don't speak of 'dues' or 'obligations.' We speak of *rights*."

"Great years ago — and they *were* great, those years — some freedmen found the light. They were not born free, but they so became, themselves. And they declared that life without three things — 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity' — was not worth having. They fought for it, they killed for it, and they got it! Time has gone by, those men have passed their way, but the Golden Rule of France still spirits the quick and eases the dead. Democracy was born of these. Congress and Congressmen, I say to you, are very little links.

"There is only one way for Labor — *it is the road of service*. Blessings come slow to great democracies. They are not reaped by chance. They are conceived in noble living, by sturdy, clean-kept minds and willing hands.

"I know what Gates is thinking, Vogel too. Look to yourself. Harmony plus conciliation gives prosperity. Capital and Labor both have rights. But don't forget the great third party — rather first! —

the Country. Serve that country now. As you guide it, so will it guide you. There have been mistakes, great, terrible, in the past. They were the first-fruits of ignorance, the working of a great experiment. A light is just ahead. By it we see the turning of a road.

"It was Washington himself who said, 'Nothing but harmony, industry, and frugality are necessary to make us a great and happy people.'

"There is no need to go back so far, either. Perhaps some think that times have changed? Listen then to Theodore Roosevelt, great-heart, patriot, statesman, man: 'If one set of our fellow citizens is degraded, you can be absolutely certain that degradation will spread more or less to all of us. This government is founded on the theory that "all men up" is a safer motto than "some men down." We must make it good. Let us pay with our bodies for our souls' desire.'

"Throw out the man who says to you, 'My friend, don't take things hard. Shirk. Be a tool. The dodger in this country gets the best.' Don't you believe it! Nail the lie fast with your fist, with the Heaven-sent doctrine of practical patriotism. Answer him back, 'I've done my duty. Have you done yours?'

"When you have found your big man, keep him. God! it might be great to be a real American — today."

The crowd of men below went wild but it might have been all waste without an opportunist. It ended happily, for Hermann Vogel led them in the "Star Spangled Banner." Mr. Gates and Reverend Sykes sang too. Several on the platform rose. Later the band chimed in, and shortly the meeting broke up.

No one thought to look for Johnson.

The men were full of themselves, and others would

gladly forget. Johnson himself did not notice, for he had left them long ago and body might well have gone with spirit in the tonic of his one great effort. He jumped from the platform and was making off through the crowd when a hand plucked at his coat, while a voice said, "Andrew, will you walk a little way with me?"

Barbara had come to him. Just how he could not imagine, though he fancied she must have followed very closely, passing perhaps through the lane he had elbowed for himself and which became the crowd again immediately.

Not answering, he seized her arm, and so they pushed along until the mass was individuals, the individuals a scattering. They reached the edge of the town, where there was nothing but the evening. He released her arm as she moved slightly, and had probably forgotten that he held it.

Down beneath, in the factory hollow, a whistle shrilled. It was sharp and short, and it reminded you of smoky places and a summons to get back. The hands had returned to night work.

The man and the girl were awkward. The initiative was finally hers.

"Andrew, it was wonderful! Indeed, you took me from myself; it seemed as though I saw again, from a very long while of being blind. How could you know, how did you *think* like that?"

"I couldn't, Barbara, at first. And then — and then — something spoke *in* me. It was as though that life, those things that have been seared in me from the beginning, called out aloud for utterance — and they would not be stilled." His face held tired shadows, but his eyes smiled as they saw the girl.

"But, ah, tonight I feel as though the great election,

everything, were mine — here, waiting to be taken by my hand."

The girl stiffened. "*Everything?*"

"Probably not. Why, though, must you ask? Such feelings as these never last, you know; a doubt, a dash of water-puff! and they had gone. Enthusiasm — votes — they're far apart.

"But plenty of wakings to that; a man should have his evening-spoils. My hopes go up tonight, up, up! like the smoke of the factories down there —" it rose and swirled, but then, despondent, dark, it settled in a sooty pall.

"Yes," said the girl, "the smoke does ascend, and it is very light and airy. It floats for a little and then it falls, or night winds blow it away like the stuff that our dreams are made of.

"Success may be to make our dreams come true; but look at it awake! Don't be a jack o' dreams. Remember my tale of the clambering vine that never quite reached the top, though when it had no opposition it was full of sappy strength. Yes, Andrew, consider the vine." She was laughing now; it was a relief. "Are you looking over the top of the wall?"

"Oh, I have not done with climbing, and I am full of courage yet. Probably, though, it is vine-like."

They walked again, and this time toward the town. Smoke choked the hollow, the lights in the mills were faint and blurred.

"But you, you, Barbara! What must I think? You know, the last few weeks . . ."

"Have been pleasantly lonely for me, my dear, though probably busy for you."

"Now surely . . ."

"Yes, I know that much has happened. 'How has it affected me?' Often I've thought: that evening, the

days since then, the times I've seen you and received a little nod. I'd be ashamed to say I've missed the little lamp that used to wink at me from above the office when you were deep in reading law — but I have!"

"We've made mistakes, I guess," went on the man dispiritedly, "but the only questionings I've had have been of me, myself. How could you really care for *me*, what can I offer you?"

"Now surely I need not tell you again," replied the girl — and straightway did a very human thing. Barbara Gates, offspring of wealth, fashionable scion of repressive schools, quietly gave and received a kiss. But I do not judge that anyone saw.

"My dearest!" he whispered, "an election is one trick I do not need, nor even want — with you."

"But I should much prefer you to have both" — she was a woman, after all — "though you will always be desirable to me. Yet even in my own heart's heart I cannot sometimes understand. It is very plain to me here; but after, when you have gone? I never want you to be too certain, for that is very bad. It is all a great experiment, an older one than I, I think.

"But what am I saying? I can accept *you*, now, but maybe I am mean enough to hesitate when I must give all of myself."

"And you were once so sure," he said reproachfully. "I counted on you. I have worked for you. The rest — is nothing. I have been a great fool, I expect. I feel I am back at beginnings."

They were home. He did not hurry.

"No, don't, please don't stay! I am so tired. You must remember that these days are coming at me from so many angles. You and father, I fear, are hopeless. I have never dared speak — of us."

"Darling, just wish me luck tomorrow. Then I shall certainly know and believe." The man was speaking.

"No, I dare not add anything now, I *can't*." The girl turned to him quickly. "But take that, sir, for your persistence." Her lips touched his cheek.

A whisper reached him from the door, "Tomorrow night, come. I will try to make you happy. And — good luck!"

He was alone.

Returning to a world of men and things, he passed by crowds of patient revellers, glad, spirited, unreckoning and careless of the morning's headaches. Few recognized him. He went upstairs to his room, at Dave's. It was dark, quiet and lonesome. He undressed without a light.

Black thoughts came crowding in. Had he made a good speech, or had he been more than an ordinary fool? how would the election go? how could it, but against him? where were his friends on a night-of-nights, or had he any? where were the men he had thought to help, and were they worth it? why must *he* raise them in spite of themselves? why should he do it at all? yes, why? how much did this girl care? if he won, should he have her too? if he lost — ah, if he lost — whom should he find to share *that*? would she be the same in either — or, if he won or lost, what right had *he* to think of happiness like this, who had not even law-books of his own, a poor, hard-toiling family in the hills for liabilities, real assets only in good strength and hope that never yet had sunk so far it could not gather for another spring? What right, indeed? His grip was failing. He muttered a hundred cursing complaints, and nearly all of himself.

He sighed unconsciously, and the heavy mantle of

despair fell down a little farther on his shoulders. "The vine that never quite reached to the top" — yes, that was it. He was a vine, growing, toiling, clambering, weak, just missing it, perhaps by inches, but clearly missing.

In the dark he struck out savagely. His fist fell on a little table. It overturned upon the floor. So might he too come clattering down, but by the gods, he would *take* his fall and no man should be glad in his complainings.

Fumbling about in the little room, he got to the narrow bed.

"Oh, God," he cried, in all his loneliness and doubt, "help me to be a man — for men!"

Sometime he slept. Gates' image showed above the foot-board of his bed; Grubbs joined it in a moment; both grinned sardonically, and from behind his hump the latter reached a rough pine board that said on it "The Fork." He made to strike, Andrew awoke.

It was day.

XXXVI

THE DAY was not old, it was wonderfully new. Reluctantly the rosy face of the sun just showed an edge across the town. Half-drunkenly itself, as if in shame or sympathy with all the rousing celebrants, it came and peered uncertainly above the scattered roof-tops, a line of rugged sentinels out-flung against the sky.

But soon it shook itself of lethargy, with a waking smile touched up the summits of the girdling hills, and finished off the autumn-frosted trees with gold. It stalked among the houses of the town and smiled again

upon the ragged mob of roofs. It even found a bit of beauty high-up among the factory stacks.

A whistle shrilled from the hills, and Johnson leaped to the floor. Men, more men, were coming from the woods and mills and he must meet them.

As he walked out on Dave's porch, the first of the tatterdemalion crew were shouting and swearing over the bridge. The shrill ping-ping of the lumberjack boot came up from the sidewalk flags and early-going villagers paused to gape as the ranks of the mill-men and hill-billies swept on from their train and into the town. Bright of clothing and stout of form they looked in the early light, as their shouted words and loud, strong laugh rang robustly out on the cold, damp air of November.

On toward Dave's they came.

"Ah, there, Andy!"

"Bane gude day, by Yiminy."

"Top o' the mornin' to ye, me boy!"

"Out airly to catch the vote, eh, lad?"

Straight for Johnson they came, on past for the bar, and then the opener of eyes their special train had made them miss. Then Ho! for bad liquor. A holiday with pay! Ah, they must take good toll. Johnson almost joined them. He made as if to follow, for now his day was here and he was weak. The unsolved questions of the night before came hammering again, the usquebaugh they poured at Dave's was strong.

But his time had come and slipped away, for Grubbs slid in another door, cried in his hunchback's shrill, cracked voice, "Good morning, boys, drink up — the first's on me! No strings tied to it, either," and each one did so gladly. The devil looked good if he stood for a drink today. The room was full, the stench of drawing pipes and raw, new-opened whiskey came out-

side. It was fairly sickening, and Johnson left for breakfast. He would gain a little time.

"Come in, me boy, come in, and get a bit. 'Twill do you good. You look played out, you do indeed. Just wait till we get a few dishes slicked up, and we'll bring yer meal right in." Dave was professionally hospitable, and Andrew dropped down gladly at a place.

Dave went and came back.

"I s'pose now, Mr. Johnson, you won't stay with us a great spell longer? Try them potatoes, fresh het up. After that speech last night don't see how this old place can hardly hold ye. Crackee! it was fine. Tell ye, if I could spout like that you bet I wouldn't be holdin' down no thankless sittiation. Here, nail on this ham. Gave it to 'em, didn't ye, yes sirree, Bob! Ought to put you right at the head of the pile. How about it? Try a little corn bread with N.O. 'lasses. How about it, heh?"

"Dave, I'm not so sure. I've sent my case to the jury, and now it's up to them."

He ate a mouthful, and a man burst in the door from the saloon. It was Cosmo Thorn, with Boddfish following. The two made straight for him.

"Come, out o' here, Andy! Get out and to work. Just show yourself. Think everything's done? Not by a long shot. Boys all in town and now's our time. Our work's cut out."

"Yes, come along, Johnson," put in Bill, "today's the day; another like it ain't so near. Grub's all right — any old time — but you've had all you need."

Johnson was ready. No breakfast tempted him.

Partly to keep them clear of mischief but mainly to lay hold of what all politicians need, more time, Gates and Vogel had got up sports and current refreshment to last well through the morning, "to give the boys a

day," as Hermann put it. Johnson in the meanwhile held a conference; said no to a proposal to spread some old misdeeds of Gates. They claimed they'd just found out the Admirable's wife — lost sight of, starving, in a little hut-like place down by Mill Hollow. A Sunday long ago came back to Johnson, a woman, broken, old, had thanked him for some yarn dropped in her hand. No! Their mission had never been nearer fulfillment, and he would make the try-out with a clean, straight deck.

His lieutenants took his hand and wished him luck, and all went into the warming day to join the men in some of their carousing and loud, gay let-down from the years of being creatures.

Gad, it was fine, and "I'll go you a new race, Sandy," or "Try me another tug, Bill," and "Go on, you son of a woodpecker, you! I'll beat you good this time."

There were strong cigars without a name and red-hot, "burny" liquor that put good spirits in them all — these from the opposition. Yet when there was a point to be adjudged it was, "Well, how about it, Andy?" or "Give us a lift with this, eh, boy?" The heart of the man warmed with his day.

Toward ten o'clock, when to Johnson indeed it seemed far more like evening, there came toward the rousing group of eager woodsmen a curious, pathetic figure. Silence filled him instead of shouts, his face was gray beside their animal red.

A few cried, "Hi, old boy, which way're you headin'?" and "What's on today, old man?"

The man or well-worn "boy" went on as calmly with his mission, which was selling papers, more explicitly the *Crier*. In a used-up voice he answered back,

"Here y'are, here y'are, today's news, all of it, right fresh from the press. Five a copy. Five a copy.

Here y'are. All 'bout the 'lection. Mr. Gates makes speech." Schwab vouched for Gates.

A few bought copies. Not many "bothered" about news, and Andrew thought of poor Bill Boddfish's excuse whenever he received a letter — he never had his glasses. Regarding him with sadness, Andrew beckoned for the newsboy and his wares. The old chap answered eagerly. Grubbs gave him a teasing slap, and the vagrant turned like a dog.

He came toward Johnson. A string for tie, gaping collar, coat of one kind, pants of another, of vests none — and it was cold. The hands that guarded the *Criers* were old and broken with work. Yet a mashed black hat was even cocked a little to one side and when he came a trifle nearer Andrew looked again, and saw the Admirable.

"Why, dear old Admirable, what are you doing here? After that night at the Fork, the others told me of it, recollect? you disappeared. They wondered where you went, and I have tried to find you, till last night, and then . . ."

"There, there, don't say no more. I went away. I couldn't stay. I never thought to come back here, but today, today . . ." His voice trailed off. "Today, I *knew* it would happen and I wanted to be in at the end."

Johnson took a paper from him.

"I always sort o' hoped I'd see the ending of it all, a happy ending, mebbe, but any sort would be relief I guess. I shan't be here again, but here I am today, a-cryin' papers with a speech about that man, that man of all."

"I'll have to be gettin' along. Got lots of 'em to sell. No, won't take nothin' from you. Much obliged. Don't bother readin' it. Good luck to you. Wish I

could bring it to you, boy. Never seemed to hand much happiness to no one, though. But t'won't last long, I guess. Good luck. Good-bye."

Johnson's eyes filled as the old man took himself away. He glanced at the paper limp in his hand: "VOGEL'S GREAT EFFORT; A. Johnson Also Speaks." Bitterness, unfairness filled him. So that was what the Admirable meant — "Don't bother reading it."

He heard a cry across the square, "Rogers, Rogers! Here, come quick!" They didn't know him! Far off, he saw the old man turn and shuffle toward the *Crier* office, whence wildly waving arms bade him still faster.

The figure waved some inky sheets, and Johnson saw the old chap take them. The man that gave them said a few words quickly, disappeared. Crimmins paused before he turned again, and Andrew saw him stooped above the page. Then suddenly he came.

"Extry!" he called, "Extry! All 'bout the big woods fire. Starts in the timber. Slab Fork goin'. Gates' town right in the flames!"

Faster, and faster, ran the old man. His shuffle became a trot, one ludicrously queer had any noticed, and then a panting run. Straight for Andrew he came, and when he almost reached his side he shouted out,

"The fire, the fire! Gates' mill burns up. The Fork is gone!" and fell down in the mess of all his papers.

Men pushed him roughly to one side and set to grabbing for the little inky sheets. When Thorn and Andrew raised the vendor he was quiet.

Someone said, "The old man's gone, I guess."

Thorn looked again. "There's something sort of smiling-like about his face." Perhaps he had seen the end of the race.

A whistle sounded, fiercely, shrilly.

A runner screamed, "Relief train! Startin' for the Fork!"

At once there was a great, mad rush and on the square where there had been some cheering, laughing men, there was just one, who bore the news, with Thorn and Andrew. Of all the rest — a scattered piece of food, an empty or a half-filled bottle — that was all.

Holden Gates' car tore by. And when the others reached the Station they found outside the man who owned their homes, their work, themselves.

He cried out, "No, by God! Not till you've voted. Back, get back to the polls, every man-jack of you. The Fork can burn. If I win there'll be another. And if you don't go back, *no one* leaves here, at all."

The thought of several scores of fire-ringed women, children too, rose up to mock the men, a top-fire bursting from the forest, its sparks and flaming bark a-whirling with the wind and settling in the mill dust, to start again in fierce, hot life on top the pine-roofed shacks. A roar as of the fire itself was wrung from the tortured men, and there were some who clambered up the car that tagged a smoking engine.

But others pushed them off again, and Gates screamed out once more.

"We're losing time. Get back — get back. You do your part and I'll do mine. You know I will!"

There was no other way. As if by plan gun muzzles bore out here and there aboard the red caboose. Back to the town they tore; the board bridge thundered to their hob-nailed tread. On, into the polls, where ballots already were "fixed," and a dozen blue-coat specials who swore by the law and cursed at the men kept them coming and going through each of the four small booths. Little hurrying did they need, but Grubbs was there to help, Grubbs and his "officers." Few had voted before.

It went through fiercely, though Andrew then, and Thorn, knew little of it for they had stayed by Crimmins. When Boddfish, Witzke and their allies tried to enter, they were simply shoved aside, the doors kept clear for voters not well known or better liked. Indignant, wild as any, they would despite have fought a way inside but Maugan said, "Repeaters!" His officers did their best. Crazy by it all, men fled again to the station.

As Thorn and Johnson, forgetting polls and thinking of their Fork, at last got to the railroad, the logger's smoke was left. The train tore away in a sooty trail, and left them whistled shrieks that sounded bleakly.

"Too late!"

Board shanties, what were they? Not homes. Gates' town? A prison place. Election days? Were nothing. They saw up there the slab-walled shacks that held a mother and a brother, for Thorn his wife and children. A sob rose in their throats.

Together they went toward town. A breath of smoke, pine-laden, pungent, assailed them at the bridge; a wisp of it brushed past their faces, farther on.

XXXVII

GATES' special never reached the Fork, not quite.

Perhaps a half-mile from the clapboard depot was the long plank span, on either side of it and all about, the woods. Some time before the news reached Mapleton, the forest fire had ringed the town itself, had jumped and crawled and swept beyond the Moosehead, down through the brushwood and culls that lined the narrow-gauge toward town.

From burning brush to wooden bridge was but a little leap for darting fire-tongues on this cool and very dry fall morning. They caught a hold; they ate and burned a space; and then went out.

The train shrieked along, a bit slowly up-grade, then gained in speed as it traversed the high plateau which held the Fork. The bridge settled a little in its place, and groaned, as though perhaps its twenty years of uncomplaining toil had left it tired. The bridge itself had never had much care; it too had got merely its living; it was weak.

Those on the train filled their lungs with acrid smoke as all cried out — "The town!"

It was in sight. Even Holden Gates held his own head higher and stiffened up his body, as if with fresh determination.

The straining locomotive reached the bridge, then its one car. The engine had almost crossed; a snapping; engine, red caboose and bridge are in the water. There are the cries of men, the hiss of steam, a great explosion. That is all.

Johnson, left by the train, had tried in agony to reach the Fork; was blocked by walls of fire. At last one man got through. His news returned to Johnson, in the town.

He pressed a hand against his forehead. His mother had been spared, and brother. But Gates? It could not be! It all seemed so incredible in the warming sunshine of late-afternoon. He thought of Barbara. Now he would go to her.

Half-dazed, he passed up State Street, turned at the short flag walk, ascended the steps to the house of Gates. Barbara was at the door, with wet eyes and hands that reached to him. They entered her home together.

LAST WORD

AND it came to pass within weeks that the impossible was once more done, that Andrew Johnson was the elected of his fellows for that odd job in Washington; and that sometime earlier he was also chosen of the one woman.

Gates' election had been written down that day, but his name was recorded in the Book somewhere above or beyond before it might have been inscribed in halls of Congress. So it fell out that there came a special poll, when Johnson's opposition was well-buried beneath a heavy snow of honest balloting. This time we like to think the best man won, though Mr. Jenny also ran.

Johnson, after all, was a queerly quixotic sort. He entered Congress while war began, and left before war was investigated. He refused another term when his own two years of able service there had closed, and why? Because he had real work at home.

He had his problems, certainly. Soon after the fire, plans had been laid for bringing its survivors down to Mapleton, and closing up for all good time their shambles there. After his marriage Johnson was made free to act for Barbara and Mrs. Gates, the former being enthusiastically *pro* and the latter only negatively *con*. There was of course some opposition to anything that might be radical, yet Johnson worked his way.

Those dwellers who had escaped — chiefly by virtue of their quick immersion in the log-pond — were

fetched to town. The timber land was well-nigh cut at any rate, and there was no reason to rebuild. Insurance covered everything but people, and though Gates had had partners, in time quite everyone was satisfied. Strangely, the fact at length came out that this vast blaze was the unaided work of one of the least of them, just "Red-eye Ed." It was the one big thing he ever did. It was also the last spree.

Business was very good — it always is if you take it right — and by some careful human engineering these folk of the Fork were recast. The men were given factory jobs that paid a wage their families lived on — well. Their wives, allowed a respite from demands of industry, made homes in bona fide houses. The children went to school. Rehoused, reclad and reemployed, reborn and recreated, Andrew's own at last could live.

Little, cooperative movements were launched as they were able. No one slaved for Johnson; all worked with him. No man was master. He met them not half-way, but all of it. He failed who could; and when he could, failed to starve. Workhouse and poorhouse did badly, but the house of man was strong.

Hearts leaped again, bodies filled out, long-dormant minds awoke. The under dog was fed, and he did not even have to beg. Others of Mapleton were made to follow in the path of Andrew Johnson and his profit-sharing partners. Perhaps, in time, no man could find a *twelve-hour job*. Spring came again in bursts of song, summer drowsed by on its contented way, and winter raised a frosty claw. But men were men; and life had found again its appetite.

Yet after all, he had but helped one man to comprehend another. He carved no model town nor city. He only blazed a way — out of fetidness, into light. He

was young and he made mistakes; but they were not like Gates'.

So in that time and single place there is worked out a little better average, and one or more have come to see how their brother ninety-and-nine had fared. In all has Johnson enjoyed — as it is only fair to add — the constant sympathy and actual support of Barbara. Her feeling, we know, has been partly atonement.

Thus have one man and a woman crossed their morass of humanity. They have tried an experiment and it pays — in men and women, children, life, and even *dollars*.

Andrew and Barbara have found their road. She grew in strength and love and understanding, and the poor beginnings were washed out by the kindly hand of Him who cannot love the sparrow less because, perhaps, he loves his human children more. Andrew was offered much, has taken little, and is living his life in serving. He remembers that while charity must hold a bitter taste, the free-will offering of the warm heart, the fair mind and friendly hand are not unappreciated by what they reach and touch. Yet even if they were? He has travelled far, and he has felt along drab journeyings the first faint breath of winds to come.

Mrs. Gates was not long for her children. She died, mayhap of a broken heart. Her world was overturned and she could not embrace the ruin. Though gone she still remains to Mapleton, one notes, in church memorials of pink stained-glass, where faults are ne'er existent and virtues ever fair. And speaking of Emma Gates — not to forget — old Crimmins and his one-time wife have decent burial, though separate.

Mrs. Johnson lived along for a time, happily. For the most part she rested. She had George and also

certain grandchildren. George had a good deal made up to him, and is not disappointing.

Should you ask for old Vogel you would not find him; he may have gained a shore where there is only one allegiance. Karl has become in course of years the model of a small-place lawyer. He sometimes speaks "for the defense," occasionally wins, retails a little insurance, and was wived with a good, plain woman who was handy with a needle, but authoritative. If not too happily, they at the least live fairly usefully.

There are not so many more you will remember. Mr. Bodeheaver should have died a-laughing at his own uncommon jokes; and that sterling fellow Busby? One day a greater mass of papers was seen atop his desk, and when they moved the maze, lo! there was Busby, with a bill marked "paid" clenched tightly in his hand? Indeed, dear public, it was nothing of the kind. The real fact is that one succumbed at length to an extremely commonplace old age, the other just the other day surrendered to an excess of bile from an ingrowing disposition; which was not *inapropos*, after all.

Maugan Grubbs swung no elections, any more. He was a fraud and many published it. His attachment to Gates had been devout, unswerving, but yet at length his votes come home to roost, and in a part-enlightened commonwealth they've found him out.

Mrs. Schwab and Mrs. Watts outlasted some dozens of teas, till in all good time they saw the day when neither could do aught but converse, and that hollowly. So even they soon went on, though true to life's ideals they *talked* to the pearly last. The Editor survives his paper.

Dave too, perhaps preserved in spirit, is outliving his hotel. Their town's new-come progressiveness be-

sought another place, until to all the modernness and prohibitions Dave's trade dissolved away as the dun-gray snows of spring; finally the fated hour when even on dull evenings his rockers caught and held no crowd. Dave retired, on receipts of forty years that had not been so bad. We presume he keeps sweet, and is happy.

Most of the rest, save only those the Great Elector has removed, are dwelling there today — except the Very Reverend Sykes, perchance you should recall him, who lived a minister and died a poor man. He did not, as some have averred, succumb during one of his sermons. It was just a gradual attrition, which occurred at the home of his wife. He perished, where he had prayed a way, in Mapleton; and there were several at his passing.

As Ezra Bodeheaver said, "he would lie with the Lord forever."





